

Protagoras of Abdera:
The Man, His Measure

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Edited by

Johannes M. van Ophuijsen
Marlein van Raalte
Peter Stork



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To Sicking
(C.M.J. Sicking 1933–2000)

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FOREWORD

The conference *Protagoras of Abdera: the Man, his Measure*, which took place at Leiden University in 2007, was organized as a special tribute to my predecessor, the Leiden Professor of Greek C.M.J. Sicking (1933–2000). Sicking, as he insisted on being called, had held the chair from 1964–1998, and the Department that I found on my arrival in Leiden very much bore his mark. Plato and Protagoras were everywhere.

Sicking himself had written several pieces about Protagoras, two of which are published in the volume of his collected essays with the beautiful title *Distant Companions*. He believed that Protagoras must have formed a serious intellectual and moral threat to Plato, and that Protagoras' ideas about what constitutes a good society was a viable and competitive alternative to Plato's. Protagoras' position, Sicking thought, may be fruitfully compared to versions of utilitarianism and to modern debates on the evolutionary origin of morality. Right before his unexpected death in January of 2000, Sicking had submitted a paper to the philosophy group of the National Research School in Classical Studies, OIKOS. In the accompanying letter he announced his intention of writing a full-scale monograph on Protagoras, who was also the topic of this last paper, although few people would have guessed so from its title: 'ὥς and ὅτι'. The paper discussed these two Greek subordinators, often translated as 'that', and the approach was a purely linguistic one. And yet, the group with which he was planning to discuss this text consisted mostly of philosophers, and the study of ὥς and ὅτι was meant to shed light on Protagoras' 'man-measure' thesis by subjecting one of its linguistic elements to intense philological scrutiny. Protagoras chooses ὥς over ὅτι and Sicking wondered whether that choice carried a meaning that might help us get a grip on the contents of Protagoras' text. Even if the attempt did not provide the ultimate key to Protagoras' words, it was worth the try. Unfortunately, Sicking's untimely death made it impossible for him to execute his plan of a monograph, a great shame if the two papers in *Distant Companions* are a reliable indication of what might have followed. They are still among the very best studies of Protagoras that we have.

When Sicking died, his work was carried on. Small-scale research seminars on Protagoras were conducted over several years, in which senior and junior researchers and interested students investigated Protagoras and prepared a new collection of sources. As a playful countermovement to the International

Plato Society, this group founded with a modest flourish the National Protagoras Society, a context for a lecture series that inspired some of the contributions in this volume. Several of Sicking's former PhD students, notably Fred Arends, Jan van Ophuijsen, and Marlein van Raalte, and his collaborator of many years Peter Stork, who had become respected Platonists and students of Protagoras in their own right, took part as speakers or organizers in the colloquium of which this volume is the result. I have always been impressed by the intellectual perseverance and scholarly dedication of this group, and by their determination to pay this extraordinary tribute to the extraordinary scholar who was their teacher. I hope some of the liveliness and engagement that characterized the conference has carried over into this volume.

Leiden, December 2012
Ineke Sluiter

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Our first debt of gratitude is to the participants of the Symposium, held at Leiden, July 5–7, 2007, that has lent its title to the present volume.

Equally indispensable was the support of the Symposium's sponsors: Brill's Publishers, Burgersdijk & Niermans Booksellers & Auctioneers, the Executive Board of Leiden University, the De Vogel Foundation, the Leiden University Fund, OIKOS (The Netherlands' Research School in Classical Studies), the Faculty of Philosophy of Leiden University, the Faculty of Philosophy of Utrecht University, the PALLAS Institute (Humanities Faculty, Leiden University), and ZENO (the Utrecht Research Institute for Philosophy).

We are especially grateful to our co-organiser of the Symposium, Frans de Haas and to his fellow editors of *Philosophia Antiqua*, as well as to Brill's anonymous referee for his or her helpful suggestions.

Through the years, many colleagues and students have been part of and contributed to the study of Protagoras leading to the Symposium, especially in the context of various seminars and lecture-series within the framework of The National Protagoras Society: Fred Arends, Daniël Bartelds, Myrthe Bartels, Tazuko van Berkel, Thijs de Beus, Jeroen Bons, Christiaan Caspers, Thomas Hart, Casper de Jonge, Nina Kroese, Mariska Leunissen, Noburu Notomi, Adriaan Rademaker, Chiara Robbiano, Ineke Sluiter, Joris Stolwijk, and Eva de Vos. We remember these *sunousiai* of intensive study of the sources—with animated discussion of whatever subject we found the *logos* leading to—with joy and gratitude.

December 2012

JMvO
MvR
PS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: PROTAGORAS OF ABDERA: *AMICUS HOMO MAGIS AMICA VERITAS?*

Johannes van Ophuijsen

One might be forgiven for despairing of the possibility of unearthing Protagoras from under the weight of the Platonic testimonies designed, as they seem, to strengthen his case only in order to demolish it more effectively. (Or his cases; we cannot even take it for granted that Protagoras aspired to the consistency and coherence between his successive pronouncements on different topics that Plato would expect from a philosopher.) It may well seem that Protagoras' original views were not sufficiently specific and determined for us to rescue him from Plato's strictures; hence, even more than with other Greek thinkers, when philosophers and philologists are talking to each other about Protagoras at all they appear to be talking at cross-purposes in a way that reduces the chance of progress for either party. If Plato's objection was that, well-intentioned as Protagoras might be, he was unable to defend his programme against being hijacked by cynical exploiters of the power of speech apparently borrowing his techniques, there seems to be little or no specific warrant for crediting Protagoras with a valid reply. The material that should support such credit may look intractable and unpromising, most crucially because most of it may be retraced to Plato himself as its first major source. In sum, it might well be felt, Protagoras' human being, like Protagoras the man himself, is admittedly friendly, *amicus homo*, but unable to meet the demand for a truth established on a firmer and surer foundation than that of his own self-proclaimed *Truth*: at best a consensus reached through disputes and persuasion by whatever means.

On closer inspection, it turns out to be possible to add to this material and to show it to be more diverse and arguably less easy to reduce to reflections of Plato. The authors of the following chapters, several of whom are involved in this revision of the source material with a view to a new edition, do not pretend that the problems of under-determination and of Platonic distortion by reconstruction are easily solved, but they try to contain and handle these problems by allowing both philosophical analysis and an informed sensitivity

to texts and contexts to bear and throw light on the documents. In this way a number of versions of recognizably Protagorean positions are brought into relief that are both capable of being assessed and worth assessing in some detachment from the immediate line-by-line context of the source material that provides them with a firm footing. It is fair to add, and not necessarily vicious either from a philosophical or from a historical point of view, that each author inevitably measures the man by his or her own measure. In the following survey I take the liberty of slightly deviating from the order in which their contributions are presented.

The results most urgently demanding to be further explored may be those centering around two issues: first, predictably, the complex of what traditionally comes under the labels of *relativism* and relativity, which come into sharper focus thanks to a number of contributions here, but where it may be inquired whether the traits newly illuminated from different angles actually converge, indeed whether they can be reconciled with each other at all; and secondly, the case for a moral and political *naturalism* as a middle way between the transcendental realism of Protagoras' much younger opponents, especially Plato, and the conventionalism traditionally associated with sophists. Finally it is worth considering whether these issues may be tentatively unified within a wider perspective.

To begin with the toughest and most intricate set of problems, labeled 'relativism' if only for the sake of convenience. Articulating relevant conceptions of relativism, Noburu Notomi (Chapter 2) points out that in the ancient tradition Protagoras' doctrine is usually found in one of three simplified and comparatively innocuous forms: the claims, first, that each thing is 'no more this than that' or 'as much that as this'; secondly, that all appearances are true; and thirdly, that all that is, is relative, thus ruling out anything that subsists by itself. By contrast, the authentically Protagorean stance poses a more serious threat to philosophy and to reason itself: Protagoras, at least as Plato construes him, tries to nullify at once *logos*, in a philosophical sense of the term, and truth.

The, or one, major crux in our primary source material is in the operative word in Protagoras' notorious thesis, 'measure' or *metron*. Tazuko van Berkel's paper (Chapter 3) offers a salutary reminder, supported by intricate detail, of just how startling and also how baffling Protagoras' notorious formula must have struck—and should be allowed to continue to strike—its audience, springing as it did from the multiple associations of everyday words, their ambiguities and apparent contradictions, and the cracks between their as yet unanalyzed uses. Her inventory, within the frame of reference she derives

from a wide range of less obvious genres and contexts, goes a long way towards substantiating what Protagoras must have seemed to be all about before Plato, half a century later, laid hands on him. Such a file is a necessary condition for any interpretation which aspires to being historical in the sense of bearing on an actual historical thinker; it is not by itself a sufficient condition for generating and uniquely determining a final interpretation, but it can and should inform interpretations: it marks off a range within which lawful interpretation must be confined, and it assists in the critical scrutiny and falsification of interpretations offered.

As we begin to move on from these basics to elaborations in various spheres of Protagoras' activity, it is charitable to adopt as a working hypothesis that these fit into a coherent scheme. As one instance, Rademaker (chapter 5) neatly demonstrates how Protagoras' views on language and poetry, rather than forming isolated offshoots of wide-ranging encyclopedic interests, are better understood as integral to his notion of a comprehensive training in responsible good citizenship; in other words, how 'correct expression' (*orthoepeia*) feeds into 'well-advisedness' (*euboulia*).

Job van Eck (Chapter 11) in an exercise of meticulous philosophical analysis grounded in close reading of the Greek text argues that current interpretations commit a 'philosophical overkill' that the *Theaetetus*' so-called secret doctrine does not need and indeed cannot absorb. We can and must hold on to enduring things indeed: processes that are capable of acting and/or of being acted upon as objects and subjects respectively, and thus of generating offspring of sorts, while yet enduring even when they do not exercise this capacity.

Arnaud Macé's project (Chapter 10) is to expose in the *Theaetetus* account of perception and change, the moment or aspect of subject and objects acting upon each other so as to distill an 'ontology of action', thereby lending substance to what the *Statesman* in a suggestive phrase calls the 'necessary' (or, 'compelling') 'essence of generation'. While Macé's account rests upon the standard account that Van Eck discards, he shares with Van Eck an interest in developing a position that is in one sense neither Protagorean nor Platonic and in another sense is both, in that it takes a Protagorean premiss to consequences that go well beyond Protagoras' intentions yet whose point is not so much to refute the Protagorean claim or to replace it with a distinctively Platonic alternative, as rather to assign it to a sphere in which there is a use for it. In other words, these contributions offer specimens of 'following the argument where it leads' and rational reconstruction of others' arguments, in an arguably cooperative vein that Plato does not often receive credit for. Van Berkel, Van Eck and Macé each in their different ways

present us with a Protagoras who nourishes and a Plato who grows by what he feeds on, becoming at once more complex and comprehensive and more consistent and coherent, in a pursuit that is collaborative and philosophically fruitful rather than parasitically exploitative or invidiously competitive: an object lesson in the value of the history of philosophy. Of course, depending on where we take our stand, it may still be felt that assigning a Protagorean claim to a sphere in which there is a use for it, equals retrospectively forcing Protagoras into a straitjacket and thereby distorting him beyond recognition. Yet it makes sense to suspend or at least postpone this kind of judgement and, precisely in order to maximize both Protagoras' and Plato's philosophical interest, to apply a twofold principle of charity by assuming that Protagoras is reconstructed by Plato in good faith and to the best of his considerable ability.

Like Notomi, Ugo Zilioli (Chapter 12) notes that the allegedly self-refuting variety of relativism may not be one that Protagoras is responsible for. His strategy is to enlist and exploit Margolis' modern version of a 'robust' relativism as a model for what Protagoras is up to and is, more importantly, philosophically justified in attempting. The decisive feature here is that perceptual relativity is connected with ontological relativism, the claim of an ontological indeterminacy that makes the very essence of the perceived object relative to and dependent on the single perceiver. To the historically minded this construal may recommend itself on the strength of an a priori presumption against anachronistic fine distinctions between epistemological and ontological considerations. However, in addition to saddling Protagoras, by Zilioli's own admission, with the burden of explaining the possibility of understanding and communication between incommensurable self-contained worlds, this interpretation faces the objections raised by Job van Eck against mainstream readings of the *Theaetetus* account of perception.

Moving on to the question of an ethical *naturalism* and its implications for a sophist's political efficacy, we may use as a foil the conventionalism that sophists are more commonly credited with. This, the view on the strength of which Nietzsche, unlike Spengler, claimed to find his own era Protagorean, is the doctrine according to which the plurality and variety of value judgements shows these judgements to be conditioned by merely local circumstances. This is taken to imply that every moral view can be justified dialectically—and by the same token, that no moral view can be grounded on a proper foundation.

In contrast to this, Adam Beresford (Chapter 7) offers us the perhaps most humanist and most contemporary—as distinct from post-modern—Protagoras. Human intelligence—the only one there is—is a mechanism

of survival. We think in order to live, rather than live in order to think, as both Plato and Aristotle would have it. As part and parcel of this, the mental habit formation that goes into socializing us, is the natural extension of our urge to survive, or even more plainly our success in surviving, resulting in an instinctive feeling of 'shame and a sense of right' and '... of fairness' (*aidôs* and *dikê*). Being the clever animal that we are, we are able at once to appreciate the natural necessity of this causal determination and to internalize the rationale for this process in the subjective form of a conscious motivation by reasons deliberately adopted. In a sustained balancing act Beresford weighs a reading of Protagoras as expounding a more run-of-the-mill social contract theory against the ethical naturalism he finally and convincingly opts for. In an anticipation of Aristotle, this brand of naturalism appeals to a conception of nature that includes what is called *second* nature and may be called *acquired* nature: another instance of a more elaborate theory, explicated in terms of potential, habit and act, appearing to evolve from a distinctly Protagorean core.

However humanist or up-to-date this naturalist Protagoras may look, his most distinctive features do not depend on what Beresford calls Protagoras' 'aggressive agnosticism'. Bernd Manuwald (Chapter 8), staying closer to the wording of the eponymous character in Plato's dialogue, especially in the myth, allows his Protagoras to pay lip service to conventional religion, which represents humans as the only living beings who believe in gods and erect altars and statues of gods. It is obviously legitimate to ask how seriously or even literally we should take this metaphysical projection; it remains more significant that what turns us into 'cultural beings' far superior to animals is those 'divine' abilities of ours that can be developed by education and thus influenced by a sophistic teacher, rather than our demiurgic, productive arts and crafts. Manuwald, like Beresford, signals a tension rather than a contradiction between on the one hand Protagoras' claims that everyone must share in justness and sanity and that everyone can be a teacher of moral and social excellence (*aretê*), and on the other hand the sophists' claim that it is they who make their students successful in public and private life. Again, the situation is more easily explained in Aristotelian terminology: norms are indispensable for societies to exist in that all their members, all human beings, must share in the capacity for being sane and just, but this allows for the simultaneous truth of different actual conceptions of justice and sanity in different communities as implied by *homo mensura*. If convention or law (*nomos*) rules, it is inscribed and grounded in nature.

Paul Demont's patient exploration (Chapter 6) of possible triangular relationships between Protagoras, Hippocratic medicine and Platonic revisions

of either, clarifies our picture of the roles played by the sophist, his pupil, and their audience, without glossing over the parts that remain less than clear. Hippocratic medicine provides a model for ‘the compatibility, so difficult to understand, between subjectivist relativism and medical efficacy’: the physician, in restoring the harmony of humours and savours, affects at once the diseased person’s actual condition and his perception of this condition. The transition from medical to political efficacy, and from sense-perception to opinion, is the transition from the sick person’s body to the citizen’s soul. Demont refers to Burnyeat’s reformulation of Protagoras’ notion of competence: X is competent ‘for’ A if and only if A deems he is better off thanks to X. With the patient, this could straightforwardly be linked to his privileged access to and veridical perception of his own bodily state; in the case of the sophist-trained politician, by a slight detour, his success in being (re-)appointed to high office becomes the measure of his fellow citizens’ perception of his competence with respect to the good of their city: we appear to have reached Kennedy-Reagan-Bushland. What seems better and so *is* better comes to seem right and so to be right—for as long as the new valuation holds. Once more cast into our loosely Aristotelian idiom: having customs and laws in general, i.e., the potential and disposition to develop particular customs and laws, constitutes being human; yet the ones we actually have are at once peculiar to each community *and* capable of being assessed by supra-individual standards of efficacy, prosperity and success. Politics is the art of enabling a city to evolve into an in this way inter-subjectively more favourable situation by modifying its legal conceptions. The politician is the person who has learned how to bring about such a change for the better. The sophist is the one who knows how to bring it about *and* who teaches others how to do this.

The proto-Aristotelian ethical naturalism thus seen to emerge from Plato’s longer sustained presentations of Protagoras’ thought seems perfectly compatible with Paul Woodruff’s (Chapter 9) demarcation and articulation of the domain of ignorance, likelihood and defeasibility in which sophistic deliberation and judgement *à la* Protagoras may avail: the area in which the operative virtue is practical wisdom or *phronêsis* in the Aristotelian sense. In the natural habitat for the skill of arguing both sides of a question that is offered by two-faced arguments (*dissoi logoi*), Protagoras might be charged with an overly innocent faith in the power of the clash of opinions to generate a truth of sorts, but Protagoras holds that excesses and aberrations can and should be prevented by embedding the free play of debate in an educational context that gives to natural endowment, to learning or art, and to practice each their due.

The discrepancy signaled by Michele Corradi (Chapter 4) between the valuations by Plato and Aristotle of Protagoras' contribution to dialectic may come as a surprise if we expect Aristotle to be sympathetic to an empirically minded, common sense approach and Plato to be impatient with lax standards of knowledge, but it may be better understood in the context of the wider scientific programme of each. Plato is initially inclined to take Protagoras seriously in view of his own project of developing an at once foundational and criterial supra-science of synoptic dialectic; Aristotle, while he follows Plato's lead in recognizing disposition (*proairesis*) as what distinguishes dialectic from sophistic, ultimately demotes Protagoras' way of conducting *logoi* to an even lower rank than Plato's in favour of his own invention of a didactic capable of imparting deductively demonstrated knowledge premised on empirically informed noetic intuitions of self-evident truths in a number of relatively self-contained fields.

The way Plato's ambivalence and Aristotle's dismissal of Protagoras reflect their own agendas may serve to remind us that our own response in turn is conditioned by *our* preoccupations and priorities, as well as by our response to Plato and to Aristotle. A few interrelated suggestions may be offered in a non-judgemental or pre-judgemental vein.

First, the concept of naturalism might be more apt than that of relativism to throw light on Protagoras' programme not only in his socio-political thought but also in what we may with due caution refer to as his (proto-)epistemological thinking. One may think of a naturalized epistemology, or rather an account of the way we know things that has not yet been de-naturalized, perhaps a causal theory of knowledge; again, something more akin to Aristotle's than to Plato's approach to knowledge. Let this feed into an embryonic, minimalist version of internal realism: 'What you see is what you get', or something not much more pretentious than this. One point worth noting, or at least considering, is that Protagoras' claims relevant to judgement, knowledge and truth, and his *homo mensura* in particular, may be understood as purely or primarily descriptive rather than critical; the normative, prescriptive dimension to his programme may be internal to his role as a paid teacher and to the claims he enables his students to champion. In practice it may not have been very easy to disentangle his techniques or hints of technique from the samples of wisdom and lore in which they were exemplified. Protagoras may well have been one of those teachers who supplied a none too rich mixture of formal instruction diluted with a liberal helping, or should one say a good measure, of memorable and memorizable content: compare Gorgias' *Helen*, or Isocrates, or the manuals

Aristotle refers to in his *Rhetoric*, and surely also the great speech of the eponymous Protagoras in Plato's dialogue.

Secondly, if it is true that approaching Protagoras along somehow naturalist lines pays off across the whole range of his philosophical anthropology, then this by itself entitles him to being evaluated, however favourably or unfavourably, as a thinker aiming towards a comprehensive and coherent view of the world or at least of the human's place and role in his world: in other words, as a philosopher in his own right rather than a peripheral or parasitic subverter of philosophy, and as a seminal thinker even if his views remain sketchy and his thought undigested in places. If so, we may fault Plato and Aristotle for particular steps they take in clarifying Protagoras' claims by working out their implications, but we cannot blame them, indeed we should give them credit, for attempting to do so in the first place. Protagoras, I suggest, needed a Plato, and was on the whole lucky that he got the one he got—and *we* are lucky that he did.

And thirdly, as a point of method, while we do well to remember how little there is that we can positively establish with regard to the historical Protagoras, I submit that we should not be too squeamish, inhibited or apologetic about resorting to a form of *eikos* argumentation in our own reconstruction or reinvention of a philosophically interesting Protagoras. Our duty is to disregard no evidence that could refute our proposals; not, to cling anxiously to what little evidence there might be found to confirm them. It is in this way that bold but controlled speculation by the joint efforts of philosophers and philological scholars can be expected to yield results—not certain results but defensible results—that reward the efforts of both parties and command the attention of third parties. We should assist Plato, or compete with him, in constructing the most exciting Protagoras our evidence will tolerate.

Along these lines, disillusioned as one may be with regard to philosophy's capacity to deliver actual truths, and wary as one might be of various major assumptions that Plato and Aristotle make in the interest of their more ambitious projects, one may be tempted to think that Protagoras' world view is to be deemed theoretically incomplete rather than inherently defective; and what is more important, that it is *pragmatically* not any less adequate for being theoretically incomplete. This applies to the world view not of the shady historical Protagoras of the scant early sources, nor to that of the stereotypical straw dog set up by Plato and more high-handedly and schematically by Aristotle for their periodic bouts of sophist-bashing, but to that of Protagoras the reformed character as revised by Plato. Thus our Protagoras, strengthened and reconstituted rather than threatened by Plato's

elaborations and refinements, and now refreshed and brushed up by the authors in the present volume, looks all set to take a new lease on life as the intellectual author of a viable and sustainable sophistic for these anti-Platonic if not anti-philosophical times.

CHAPTER TWO

A PROTAGONIST OF THE SOPHISTIC MOVEMENT? PROTAGORAS IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Noburu Notomi

1. IS PROTAGORAS THE FIRST SOPHIST?

1.1. *Question about Protagoras*

What is Protagoras? Is he a sophist? If so, what does that mean? This question is not an easy one to answer, first of all because hardly anything of his writings has survived. Moreover, when we ask whether Protagoras is a sophist, we may already be seeing him within the Platonic framework, which presupposes a strict dissociation of the philosopher and the sophist. I aim to shed new light on this question from the sources outside Plato.¹ It will prove to be the case that Protagoras presents philosophy with a serious challenge, which ancient thinkers found hard to deal with. For this reason Plato severely criticizes him as the first sophist.

One may wonder if it matters whether Protagoras was a sophist or a philosopher. Modern scholarship offers divergent views on the sophistic movement.²

- (1) Many people did and still do criticize the sophists as teachers of apparent wisdom and empty rhetoric, or as manipulators of eristic arguments and fallacies. The sophists are bitterly condemned as amorality in respect of relativism and atheism.³

¹ Diels-Kranz include about 50 testimonies of Protagoras, to which Capizzi 1955 adds 40. I have collected some 330 testimonies mentioning Protagoras or his thesis, from the 5th century BC to the Byzantine period. Contrary to the common pessimistic view that we have no important evidence outside Plato, I will show that there are a substantial number of ancient testimonies to contrast with, or support, Plato's treatment. For this new evidence, see Notomi forthcoming.

² For a history of the views on the sophists, see Kerferd 1981a, Ch. 2; Kerferd 1981b; Schiappa 1991, Ch. 1.

³ Judging from the famous statement in "*On gods*" (reconstructed as DK 80 B 4, II.265.7–9),

- (2) Since Hegel, the sophists are put down as subjectivists, who prepared the full-blown philosophy of Socrates and Plato. They are positively evaluated if only as a negative factor in the history of philosophy.
- (3) The recent revival of the sophistic movement tends to appraise the sophists as truly important thinkers, i.e., as philosophers. They engaged in natural sciences (such as mathematics and astronomy), logic, linguistics, literary criticism, sociology, politics, ethics, epistemology, and religion.⁴
- (4) Since Nietzsche, the sophists are praised as heroes of anti-philosophy; in contrast to Plato, who is elitist, anti-democratic, totalitarian, and absolutist, the sophists represent freedom, egalitarianism, and democracy.⁵ Their teaching of rhetoric and relativism attracts modern human and social scientists.

We can see Protagoras featuring in each of these views as a representative sophist.

1.2. 'First Sophist'

All these views take it for granted that Protagoras was the *first* sophist. In fact, this is how Plato presents him: in the dialogue *Protagoras*, 'Protagoras' professes to be the first man who calls himself 'sophist', i.e., a professional teacher of virtue who charges a fee for education.

[1]

ἐγὼ οὖν τούτων τὴν ἐναντίαν ἄπασαν ὁδὸν ἐλήλυθα, καὶ ὁμολογῶ τε σοφιστὴς εἶναι καὶ παιδεύειν ἀνθρώπους (...).

Therefore, I have taken a course entirely different from theirs (i.e., disguised sophists such as Homer, Hesiod, Simonides, Orpheus and others), and I admit that I am a sophist and that I educate men.

Plato *Prot.* 317 B 3–5 (DK 80 A 5, II.256.13–15)

We usually take this declaration by the Protagoras of Plato as historical, and regard him as the protagonist of the sophistic movement. Later it became a commonplace that Protagoras was *the first* (πρῶτος) professional teacher:⁶

Protagoras was not atheist in the strict sense of the word. Initially he was regarded as a sceptic or an agnostic, but at a later stage came to be included among the 'atheists'. This change in treatment is examined in Notomi 2008.

⁴ Following the classical work of Grote 1850/1855, Ch. 67; this trend is represented by Kerferd 1981a.

⁵ Cp. Popper 1945; Havelock 1957.

⁶ In DL 9.51–54 (DK 80A.1, II.253.23–254.21), Protagoras is repeatedly (9 times) described

[2]

οὗτος πρῶτος μισθὸν εἰσεπράξατο μνᾶς ἑκατόν' (...).

He was the first to exact a fee of a hundred minae, ...

DL 9.52 (DK 80 A 1, II.254.1)

[3]

τὸ δὲ μισθοῦ διαλέγεσθαι πρῶτος εὗρε, πρῶτος δὲ παρέδωκεν Ἕλλησι (...).

He was the first to take a fee for argument and to introduce it among the Greeks, ... Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 1.494.27–28 (DK 80 A 2, II.255.29–30)

[4]

καὶ ἐπεκλήθη πρῶτος οὗτος σοφιστής (...).

He was the first to be called a sophist, ...

Suda Π 2958 s.v. Πρωταγόρας, 4.247.3 Adler

Concerning this statement, we are faced with two questions:

- (1) Clear as this statement is, we may wonder whether it is a historical statement made by Protagoras himself. Plato's dialogue *Protagoras* is generally supposed to have a dramatic setting in 433–432 BC, some years before Plato was born. The vivid conversation at Callias' house is no doubt Plato's masterpiece, but we must be aware of its fictionality. As its subtitle '*Sophists*' suggests,⁷ this dialogue is concerned with Socrates' confrontation with the sophists, and with Protagoras as the first and greatest among them.
- (2) Even if Protagoras declared himself to be the 'first sophist' at some occasion, we may wonder what he meant to say. It may be nothing more than an exhibition of his teaching profession as something new, while its content was not essentially different from that of the traditional thinkers. If this is the case, for Protagoras the name 'sophist' may have been a mere label to dissociate himself from others.⁸

in terms of 'the first' (πρῶτος) in some respect; see also the expression in Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* (twice in 1.10, 494 = [3]), Scholium *ad Rep.* 600 C (*Scholia Platonica*, p. 273 Greene; DK 80 A 3, II.255.35–256.5) (once), and *Suda* s.v. Πρωταγόρας (3 times; cp. [4]). It is therefore reasonable to assume a tradition of ascribing 'the first' to Protagoras (including 'the first sophist'). The *Lamprias Catalogue* of Plutarch contains the work entitled "On the *first things* of Protagoras" (141: Πρωταγόρου περὶ τῶν πρώτων), which might be a collection of the 'first things' attributed to Protagoras.

⁷ Cp. DL 3.59: Πρωταγόρας ἢ σοφισταί.

⁸ We must remember that Gorgias, another eminent sophist, seems to avoid this very label, or in any case, to have denied that he was a teacher in virtue, judging from Plato's

These two questions—whether Protagoras claimed to be the first sophist, and if so, what he meant by this claim—are hard to answer, particularly when we look at Plato’s dialogues only. On the other hand, my examination of the ancient testimonies shows at least how Protagoras was treated by his contemporaries and by later generations.

1.3. *Contemporary Views*

Protagoras was well-known amongst his contemporaries, including the Athenians of the latter half of the fifth century BC. The testimonies show us that he was regarded as a sophist, but not necessarily in the Platonic sense.

The comic poet Eupolis produced the *Flatterers* (Κόλακες) in 421 BC, which represents the flock of flatterers at the house of Callias,⁹ among whom Protagoras speaks:

[5]

ἔνδον μὲν ἐστὶ Πρωταγόρας ὁ Τήιος,
ὅς ἀλαζονεύεται μὲν ἀλιτήριος
περὶ τῶν μετεώρων, τὰ δὲ χαμάθεν ἐσθίει.

Inside is Protagoras of Teos,
who sins in making false pretensions
about the things in the air, whilst he consumes things on the ground.¹⁰

Eup. *Col.* fr. 157.1–3, *PCG* 5.382; line 1: DL 9.50 (DK 80 A 1, II.253.18–19); 2–3
Eust. *Comm. ad Hom. Od.* 5.490, 1.1547, 233.25 (DK 80 A 11, II.257.31–33)

As Eustathius, in quoting the fragment, calls him “natural philosopher” (τὸν φυσικὸν Πρωταγόραν, 233.24), Protagoras was probably presented as a typical intellectual who boasts of various kinds of knowledge. In fact, in another fragment of Eupolis’ *Flatterers* Protagoras imparts some medical knowledge to Callias.¹¹

Meno (95 C 1–4), whilst engaging in similar activities and properly regarded as sophist by his contemporaries and later generations.

⁹ For Eupolis’ *Flatterers*, see Storey 2003, 179–197. This setting is mentioned in Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.59, 218 B–C (DK 80 A 11, II.257.18–28), where, at the same time, Athenaeus testifies that Ameipsias’ *Connus* (cp. Amipsias ii, *PCG* 2.200) of 423 BC, did not include Protagoras “in the chorus of thinkers” (ἐν τῷ τῶν φροντιστῶν χορῷ, 218 C).

¹⁰ I think it highly likely that Plato reworks this setting in the *Protagoras* (314 E 3–315 B 8), and alludes to this play when he uses the concept of ‘κολακεία’ (flattery) as the main feature of rhetoric and sophistry in *Gorgias* 463 C 1–2, 465 B 1–466 A 6; cp. Nightingale 1995, 186–187.

¹¹ Eup. *Col.* fr. 158, *PCG* 5.383 (DK 80 A 11, II.257.33–35): πίνειν γὰρ αὐτὸν Πρωταγόρας ἐκέλευ’, ἵνα | πρὸ τοῦ κυνὸς τὸν πλεύμον’ ἔκπλυτον φορῇ. “Protagoras ordered him (Callias) to drink (wine), so that | before (the rising of) the Dog-Star he would have his lungs washed out”. (1–2 = Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 7.1.3, 699 A; 2 = Athen. *Deipn.* 1.41, 22 F; cp. Macr. *Sat.* 7.15.22).

Although Eupolis may not have called him ‘sophist’ in the play, this image inevitably reminds us of ‘the sophist Socrates’ in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, first produced in 423 BC (two years before Eupolis’ *Flatterers*). This play neither features Protagoras nor mentions him, but ancient scholiasts already noted that it represents not Socrates’, but Protagoras’ method of argumentation.¹² Modern scholars also detect several allusions, above all in Socrates’ play on the gender of words (*Nub.* 658–679: DK 80 C 3, II.270.32–271.7, cp. A 28, II.262.14–18) and in the explicit denial of existence of gods (*Nub.* 367, 826–831).¹³

In his school Socrates teaches “both stronger and weaker arguments”:

[6]

εἶναι παρ’ αὐτοῖς φασὶν ἄμφω τῷ λόγῳ,
τὸν κρείττον’, ὅστις ἐστί, καὶ τὸν ἥττονα.
τούτοιον τὸν ἕτερον τοῖν λόγοιν, τὸν ἥττονα,
νικᾶν λέγοντά φασι τὰ δίκαιώτερα.

I’m told they keep two *logoi*,
the stronger (better), whichever it is, and the weaker (worse) one.
Of these two *logoi*, the latter, namely the weaker one,
I’m told, can plead the unjust side of a case and win.

Aristoph. *Nub.* 112–115;

Strepsiades speaking (DK 80 C 2, II.270.25–29; cp. A 21)

Diogenes Laertius reports that Protagoras was the first thinker to assert that there are two statements (λόγοι) on each matter: his teaching is meant to construct both *pro* and *con* arguments.¹⁴ However this may be, the basic idea that his teaching is aimed at constructing both *pro* and *con* arguments is already apparent in both Aristophanes and Plato, who in his *Sophist* (232 B 1–233 C 3) defines the sophist, with reference to Protagoras, as someone able to controvert (ἀντιλέγειν) on any subject.¹⁵ Another expression “upset arguments by controverting” (ἀνατρέψω ταῦτ’ ἀντιλέγων) in *Clouds* 901 also reminds us of his method of disputation.

¹² *Schol. rec. in Nub.* 112b (SA 1.3.2, 224 Koster); Tzetzes *Comm. in Nub.* 106a (SA 4.2, 407 Holwerda) and 110 (SA 4.2, 409 Holwerda); Protagoras is also said to imitate Socrates: Tzetzes *Comm. in Nub.* 1041a (SA 4.2, 624 Holwerda).

¹³ With an allusion (Σωκράτης ὁ Μήλιος 830) to Diagoras of Melos, which later became a standard reference for atheism.

¹⁴ DL 9.51 (DK 80 A 1, II.253.23–25 = 80 B 6a, II.266.13–14). Other explicit testimonies are from Seneca (*Ep. Mor.* 88.43; DK 80 A 20, II.260.2–4), and Clemens Alex. (*Strom.* 6.8.65.1, 2.464.14–16 Stählin-Früchtel; DK 80 A 20, II.260.1–2).

¹⁵ Reference to Protagoras’ *On wrestling*, 232 D 5–E 5 (DK 80 B 8, II.267.2–5). Protagoras is said to have written two books entitled Ἀντιλογίαι, DL 9.55 (DK 80 A 1, II.255.4).

In *Nub.* 114–115 this activity is coupled with another typical claim of the sophists, that of “making a weaker argument stronger” (τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν).¹⁶ Later in the play, the weaker (worse) argument actually defeats the stronger (better) one (*Nub.* 889–1111). This teaching is attributed to Protagoras by Eudoxus:

[7]

(...) Πρωταγόρας, ὃν Εὐδόξος ἱστορεῖ τὸν ἥσσω καὶ κρείσσω λόγον πεποιημέναι καὶ τοὺς μαθητὰς δεδιδασχέναι τὸν αὐτὸν ψέγειν καὶ ἐπαινεῖν.

(...) Protagoras, who, Eudoxus records, made the weaker argument actually the stronger, and taught his pupils to censure and praise the same person.

Eud. fr. 307 Lasserre;

Steph. Byz. *Ethnica* s.v. Α 6 Ἀβδηρα, 1.18.13–15 Billerbeck (DK 80 A 21, II.260.9–11)

These claims are certainly related to Protagoras' rhetorical education. Aristotle connects the probability (εἰκός) argument of Corax with Protagoras' method:

[8]

καὶ τὸ τὸν ἥττω δὲ λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν τοῦτ' ἐστίν. καὶ ἐντεῦθεν δικαίως ἐδυσχέ-
ραινόν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸ Πρωταγόρου ἐπάγγελμα· ψεῦδός τε γὰρ ἐστίν, καὶ οὐκ ἀληθές
ἀλλὰ φαινόμενον εἰκός, καὶ ἐν οὐδεμιᾷ τέχνῃ ἄλλ' ἐν ῥητορικῇ καὶ ἐριστικῇ.

This is what ‘making the weaker (worse) appear the stronger (better) argument’ means. Hence men were justly disgusted with the claim of Protagoras; for it is a lie, not a real but an apparent probability, not found in any art except rhetoric and eristic.

Arist. *Rhet.* 1402 a 24–28 (DK 80 A 21, II.260.5–8; cp. B 6b)

1.4. *Later Generations*

In addition to the plays that show contemporary views of Protagoras,¹⁷ the next generations often discussed him: apart from Plato, Isocrates' *Helen* mentions Protagoras as one of the sophists of old who contrived paradoxical doctrines and eristic arguments:

¹⁶ See, for example, Plato *Apol.* 18 B 7–C 1: τὰ τε μετέωρα φροντιστῆς καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς πάντα ἀνεζητηκώς καὶ τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιών.

¹⁷ Euripides, too, may contain some allusions to Protagoras. *Bacchae* (produced in 406 BC) 200–203 (DK 80 C 4, II.271.10–13) is usually assumed to be an allusion to Protagoras' argument on gods: (Tiresias speaking) οὐδὲν σοφίζομεθα τοῖσι δαίμοσιν. | (...) οὐδεὶς αὐτὰ καταβαλεῖ λόγος, | οὐδ' εἰ δι' ἄκρων τὸ σοφὸν ἠΰρῃται φρενῶν. “It is not for us to speculate about the gods. | (...) no *logos* (reason or argument) shall throw them down, | whatever subtleties have been invented by deep wits”, *Bacch.* 200, 202–203. Philochorus (328 fr. 217 *FGrHist*) reports that Euripides in the *Ixion* alludes to the death of Protagoras (DL 9.55 DK 80 A 1, II.255.5–7); Tazuko van Berkel has pointed out another allusion in the *Palamedes*, fr. 578, *TrGF* 5.2.598–599 (p. 55 n. 70 below).

[9]

νῦν δὲ τίς ἐστιν οὕτως ὀψιμαθής, ὅστις οὐκ οἶδε Πρωταγόραν καὶ τοὺς κατ' ἐκείνον τὸν χρόνον γενομένους σοφιστάς, ὅτι καὶ τοιαῦτα καὶ πολὺ τούτων πραγματωδέστερα συγγράμματα κατέλιπον ἡμῖν;

But as it is, who is such a late-learner as not to know that Protagoras and the sophists of his time have left to us writings of similar character and even far more overwrought than these? Isocr. *Hel.* 2

In this preface Isocrates criticizes Antisthenes' claim that "it is impossible to say, or to controvert, what is false",¹⁸ and Plato's unity of virtues. Then (10.2–3) he traces this trend back to Protagoras, Gorgias, Zeno, and Melissus. Protagoras is here included in the sophists, but it is not clear how far this appellation separates him from other thinkers.¹⁹

In a similar way Xenophon has Socrates mention Protagoras among the sophists, in the introductory conversation with Callias in the *Symposium*:²⁰

[10]

αἰεὶ σὺ ἐπισκώπτεις ἡμᾶς καταφρονῶν, ὅτι σὺ μὲν Πρωταγόρα τε πολὺ ἀργύριον δέδωκας ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ καὶ Γοργίᾳ καὶ Προδίκῳ καὶ ἄλλοις πολλοῖς, ἡμᾶς δ' ὀρθῶς αὐτουργοὺς τινὰς τῆς φιλοσοφίας ὄντας.

You are always looking down on us and making fun of us, for you yourself have paid a good deal of money for wisdom to Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus and many others, while you see us as amateurs in philosophy. Xen. *Symp.* 1.5

The dramatic setting is in the house of Callias in 421 BC (the same year as Eupolis' *Flatterers*). Here Protagoras, Gorgias, and Prodicus are treated as three major professional teachers of wisdom (in contrast to those engaged in

¹⁸ Isocr. *Hel.* 1 οὐ φάσκοντες οἷόν τ' εἶναι ψευδῆ λέγειν οὐδ' ἀντιλέγειν οὐδὲ δύω λόγῳ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πραγμάτων ἀντειπεῖν. Antisthenes' claim is associated with Protagoras by Diogenes Laertius, referring to Plato's *Euthydemus* (DL 9.53; DK 80 A 1, II.254.6–8): καὶ τὸν Ἀντισθένην λόγον τὸν πειρώμενον ἀποδεικνύειν, ὥς οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν, οὗτος πρῶτος διείλεκται, καθὰ φησι Πλάτων ἐν Εὐθυδήμῳ. "And he (Protagoras) was the first to use in discussion the argument of Antisthenes, which strives to prove that it is impossible to controvert, as Plato claims in the *Euthydemus*". Plato *Euthyd.* 286 C 2–3, however, does not directly attribute this argument to Protagoras.

¹⁹ We should bear in mind that Isocrates used the word 'sophist' (σοφιστάς, *Hel.* 2) in a way which differs from Plato. For Isocrates it means a professional teacher, just as 'philosopher'. At least Isocrates here mentions both Eleatic philosophers and sophists.

²⁰ Notably Xenophon provides no reference to Protagoras in the *Memorabilia*. For Callias' contribution to sophists (including Protagoras), see Plato *Protagoras*, *Apol.* 20 A 4–C 3, and *Crat.* 391 B 11–C 5.

philosophy).²¹ This seems to be a common view of the first half of the fourth century BC, but may also be influenced by Plato.

1.5. *Plato's Invention?*

Even if the appellation 'sophist' originated with Protagoras, it may be Plato who first used it as a label for criticism.²² The clear distinction between the philosopher and the sophist, the one positive and the other negative, is almost exclusively seen in Plato up to the early fourth century BC. It is in order to defend Socrates by dissociating him from his contemporary sophists Protagoras, Gorgias, and others that Plato criticizes the sophists unremittingly, putting them in sharp contrast to Socrates in his dialogues. In the *Apology*, Socrates states first of all that he is not a sophist (i.e., a professional teacher of wisdom), whereas the contemporary Athenians saw no clear difference between Socrates and other intellectuals, at his trial.²³

Moreover, other Socratics than Plato did not clearly distinguish between the philosopher and the sophist. Xenophon cared little about the difference between Socrates and the sophists (except for one episode about the sophist Antiphon, *Mem.* 1.6).²⁴ Aeschines of Sphettus wrote a dialogue called *Callias*, which featured a group of sophists, including Anaxagoras along with Prodicus.²⁵ Moreover, Antisthenes was taught by Gorgias and engaged in sophistic arguments.²⁶ Another senior pupil, Aristippus, himself became a sophist by

²¹ "Amateurs in philosophy" means those who work at philosophy by themselves, without a teacher. Socrates contrasts his way of working at philosophy with that of Callias, a pupil of the professional teachers of wisdom (not his way with that of the sophists).

²² As Aelius Aristides 46 (Πρόξ Πλάτωνος ὑπὲρ τῶν τεττάρων), 2.407 Dindorf (DK 79.1: "Ἄλtere Sophistik: Name und Begriff", II.252.3–22) points out, the word 'σοφιστής' was used in the sense of 'wise man' already by Herodotus in the latter half of the fifth century BC, and it still kept its positive or neutral connotation in the early fourth century BC, as in Isocrates and the historian Androtion (324 fr. 39 *FGrHist*).

²³ Aristophanes' *Clouds*, which Socrates mentions in Plato's *Apology* 19 B 4–C 5, is a comical exaggeration, but probably is not very far from the ordinary Athenians' perception of Socrates and sophists.

²⁴ In this passage, Socrates himself criticizes the sophist Antiphon for charging money. Therefore, the original distinction may well derive from Socrates himself; certainly more emphasis is put on this aspect by Plato than by others. Cp. Notomi 2010.

²⁵ In one of its fragments (Athen. *Deipn.* 5.62, 220 B–C = SSR VI A 73.), "Anaxagoras" was once emended to "Protagoras" by Cobet 1836, 61, which is followed by Krauss 1911, 50 (cp. DK 80 C 5, II.271.14), but the emendation lacks firm ground.

²⁶ As Decleva Caizzi, 2006, 126 points out, we do not have to assume, *pace* Diogenes Laertius (6.1–2), that Antisthenes gave up the teaching of Gorgias when he became associated with Socrates.

taking a fee for teaching, and therefore was called a sophist by Aristotle.²⁷ This seems to correspond to the position of Isocrates and Alcidamas, two major pupils of Gorgias and rhetoricians contemporary with Plato, who were proud of being professional sophists *and* philosophers.²⁸

As compared to these, we find that Plato is the only writer in the early fourth century BC who constantly attacks the sophists and aims to separate them from the philosopher, both by representing Socrates in contrast to the sophists and by theorizing on this distinction. Thus, the image of the 'sophist' as 'non-philosopher' may well be Plato's invention, and he probably influenced Xenophon and others. Our next question, then, is what historical significance Protagoras' identification as sophist bears.

2. SOPHIST VS. PHILOSOPHER

In historiography a certain tension is to be detected as to the position of Protagoras, between a sophist and a philosopher, as witness the major sources written around the third century AD, namely Diogenes Laertius, Sextus Empiricus, and Flavius Philostratus. Both Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, and Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* introduce Protagoras. He is the only sophist who features in both *Lives*. On the one hand, Protagoras is placed in the successions of philosophers and treated as a kind of dogmatist, on the other, he is regarded as a major sophist and rhetorician.

2.1. Protagoras the Philosopher

Let us first examine the sources for Protagoras as philosopher. In book 9 of his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* Diogenes Laertius devotes one chapter (8 = 9.50–56) to Protagoras, after Democritus (9.34–49) and before Diogenes of Apollonia (9.57).²⁹ He is placed in the succession of the Italian philosophers, since it was a common understanding in antiquity that Protagoras was a pupil

²⁷ Arist. *Met.* 996 a 32 (τῶν σοφιστῶν τινὲς οἷον Ἀρίστιππος). Aristippus probably was the 'sophist' criticized in Xenophon's *Cyngeticus* 13. For these testimonies, see Notomi 2010.

²⁸ For Alcidamas' attitude towards philosophy, see his treatise *On the Sophists* 2, 15, and 29.

²⁹ DK 80 A 1, II.253.15–255.16; cp. B 4, II.265.5, B 6a, II.266.13–14. Protagoras is not mentioned in the prologue (DL 1.1–21). Book 9 shows some obvious confusions: at the beginning Diogenes indicates that it deals with the so-called 'sporadic' philosophers, starting from Heraclitus (8.91), but actually discusses the succession of Xenophanes (9.18–20)—Parmenides (9.21–23)—Melissus (9.24)—Zeno (9.25–29)—Leucippus (9.30–33)—Democritus (9.34–49). Diogenes of Apollonia comes after Protagoras, apparently without any good reason.

of Democritus (see Diogenes Laertius, Clement of Alexandria, and others).³⁰ Protagoras is thus placed in the Successions literature, after the Eleatics (Parmenides, Melissus, Zeno) and Atomists (Leucippus, Democritus), and before Pyrrho and Epicurus.³¹

The master-pupil relationship between Democritus and Protagoras is, however, rejected by modern scholars as chronologically improbable: Protagoras (ca. 490–415/411) is dated one generation earlier than Democritus (ca. 465/460–375).³² And in any case, as far as his teaching is concerned, Diogenes clearly represents Protagoras as a sophist (see below). The only philosophical report is the beginning of the *Truth* (the *homo mensura* thesis) and its loose paraphrase derived from Plato's *Theaetetus* (161 C 2–D 7), that “all things are true” (πάντα εἶναι ἀληθῆ, 9.51).

The biographical information contained in Diogenes Laertius has much in common with that in the scholium *Rep.* 600 C (*Scholia Platonica ad Remp.* 600 C, DK 80 A 3, II.255.35–256.5; usually thought to be derived from the *Onomatologos* of Hesychius Milesius), and the *Suda* Π 2958 s.v. Πρωταγόρας (cp. [4] above). Since these sources also include Prodicus, we may safely assume that the source(s) of Diogenes was/were not exclusively concerned

³⁰ Diogenes Laertius says that “Protagoras studied under Democritus” (δῆκουσε δὲ ὁ Πρωταγόρας Δημοκρίτου, 9.50; DK 80 A 1, II.253.21); Clement says that “Protagoras of Abdera and Metrodorus of Chios were pupils of Democritus” (Δημοκρίτου δὲ ἀκουσται Πρωταγόρας ὁ Ἀβδηρίτης καὶ Μετρόδωρος ὁ Χίος, *Strom.* 1.14.64.4; DK 70 A 1, II.231.3–4). See also Apuleius, *Florida* 18 (DK 80 A 4, II.256.8–12); Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 1.10, 494.9 (DK 80 A 2, II.255.18; 68 A 9, II.85.33–34), and *Schol. ad Plat. Remp.* 600 C, 273 Greene = Hesychius Milesius (DK 80 A 3, II.255.36). On the other hand, *Suda* (s.v. Prodicus 4.201.25 Adler; DK 84 A 1, II.308.22–24) reports that Prodicus, a contemporary of Democritus and Gorgias, is a pupil of Protagoras (DK 84 A 1, II.308.24–25), which correctly implies that Protagoras is older than Democritus. Eusebius calls Protagoras “Δημοκρίτου ... ἐταῖρος”, *Praep. Ev.* 14.3.7 (DK 80 B 4, II.265.2–3).

³¹ There are several reports of the succession:

- (1) Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 14.17.10 (DK 69 A 1, II.230.12–15): Xenophanes—Parmenides—Melissus—Zeno—Leucippus—Democritus—Protagoras & Nessas—Metrodorus—Diogenes—Anaxarchus—Pyrrho;
- (2) Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 10.14.15–16: Xenophanes—Parmenides—Melissus—Zeno—Leucippus—Democritus—Protagoras;
- (3) Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1.14.64.2–4: Xenophanes—Parmenides—Zeno—Leucippus—Democritus—Protagoras & Metrodorus—Diogenes of Smyrna—Anaxarchus—Pyrrho—Nausiphanes (—Epicurus) [for Diogenes of Smyrna and Protagoras, see Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 3.2.9, n. 17 (= GCS 3.506.20–21, DK 71.2, II.235.3–4, DG 591.3–4)];
- (4) Pseudo-Galenus, *Hist. Philos.* 3 (DG 601.3–12): (Pythagoras—) Xenophanes—Parmenides—Zeno—Leucippus of Abdera—Democritus—Protagoras [where Protagoras is called: Πρωταγόρας ὁ Ἀβδηρίτης ζηλωτής, ὃς καὶ συστάτης τῶν κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν τεχνῶν].

³² For this, see the next section on Epicurus' letter.

with ‘philosophers’. Evidently Protagoras was included in the philosophers mainly because of the Successions.

As compared with Diogenes, Sextus Empiricus takes Protagoras more seriously as a philosopher. He tries to distinguish his Pyrrhonian scepticism from Protagoreanism (*Pyrrh. Hyp.* 1.32), and then claims that, when Protagoras proposes ‘measure’ (μέτρον), he means ‘criterion’ (κριτήριον).³³

[11]

μέτρον μὲν λέγων τὸ κριτήριον, χρημάτων δὲ τῶν πραγμάτων, ὡς δυνάμει φάσκειν πάντων πραγμάτων κριτήριον εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, (...) καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τίθησι τὰ φαινόμενα ἐκάστω μόνον, καὶ οὕτως εἰσάγει τὸ πρὸς τι.

(...) by ‘measure’ he means the criterion, and by ‘things’ the objects, so that he is in effect asserting that man is the criterion of all objects (...). And consequently he posits only what appears to each individual, and thus he introduces relativity.³⁴ SE *Pyrrh. Hyp.* 1.216 (DK 80 A 14, II.258.18–21)

[12]

(...) ἐπεὶ φησι πάσας τὰς φαντασίας καὶ τὰς δόξας ἀληθεῖς ὑπάρχειν καὶ τῶν πρὸς τι εἶναι τὴν ἀλήθειαν διὰ τὸ πᾶν τὸ φανέν ἢ δόξαν τινὶ εὐθέως πρὸς ἐκείνον ὑπάρχειν.

..., since he (sc. Protagoras) asserts that all appearances and opinions are true, and that truth is a relative thing because everything that has appeared to someone or been opined by someone is at once real in relation to him.

SE *Adv. Math.* 7.60 (DK 80 B 1, II.262.32–263.2)

‘Relativity’ (τὸ πρὸς τι) is an important tool for sceptics to avoid absoluteness. All the ten modes of Aenesidemus appeal to ‘relativity’ (the eighth mode: *Pyrrh. Hyp.* 1.38–39, 135–140), and the third mode of Agrippa also uses ‘relativity’ (*Pyrrh. Hyp.* 1.167). Therefore, Sextus needs to deal with Protagoreanism in order to dissociate it from his own scepticism.³⁵

However, Sextus’ subsequent account of Protagoreanism is contaminated with Plato’s, which connects it with the Heraclitean flux theory in the

³³ Cp. Plato *Th.* 178 B 6 (τὸ κριτήριον, cp. κριτής, 160 C 8); but there the word ‘criterion’ is not as technical as in later thinkers.

³⁴ This understanding was typical in late antiquity (we shall come back to this later). However, I will suggest that relativity (τὸ πρὸς τι) does not always entail relativism (see note 70 below).

³⁵ Protagorean relativism might be a major source for Pyrrhonian scepticism. Plutarch has Florus say that “This carries us via Protagoras straight to Pyrrho” (ταῦτ’ ... ἀντικρυς εἰς τὸν Πύρρωνα διὰ τοῦ Πρωταγόρου φέρει ἡμᾶς, *Quaest. conv.* 3.5.2, 652 B). In the Successions, Protagoras is sometimes placed in the tradition culminating in Pyrrho (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 14.17.10, and Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1.14.64.2–4; see note 31 above).

Theaetetus (i.e., the theory of the interaction between the percipient and the material object).³⁶ It is on this understanding that Sextus classifies Protagoras among the dogmatists.

Similarly, Cicero in the *Academica Priora* (*Lucullus*) mentions Protagoras as a dogmatist and ascribes to him the criterion of truth, along with the Cyrenaics, Epicurus, and Plato:

[13]

aliud iudicium Protagorae est, qui putat id cuique verum esse quod cuique videatur.

One view of the criterion is that of Protagoras, who holds that what seems true to each person is true for each person.³⁷ Cic. *Ac. Pr.* 2.142

Thus, it seems that scepticism, both Academic and Pyrrhonian, had a common tradition of placing Protagoras' *homo mensura* thesis in dogmatism.

On the other hand, Sextus refers to some people who counted Protagoras among the dogmatists who *reject* the criterion of truth, such as Xenophanes, Xenias, and Gorgias:³⁸

[14]

καὶ τοῦτον δὴ κινεῖν τινὲς ὑπενόησαν τὸ κριτήριον, ἐπεὶ περ τοῦτ' ἂν τῶν καθ' αὐτὰ ὑποκειμένων δοκιμαστικὸν εἶναι βούλεται, τοῦ τε ἀληθοῦς καὶ τοῦ ψευδούς διοριστικὸν ὑπάρχειν, ὃ δὲ προειρημένος ἀνὴρ οὔτε καθ' αὐτό τι ὑπάρχον οὔτε ψεύδος ἀπολέλοιπεν.

Some people have supposed that he (sc. Protagoras) rejects the criterion, seeing that it purports to be a test of things existing by themselves (absolute realities) and to discriminate between the true and the false, whereas the man just

³⁶ I have found no independent evidence (outside the Platonic tradition) that Protagoras bases his *homo mensura* thesis on the Heraclitean ontology. Aristotle mentions Heraclitus and Heracliteans in discussing those who violate the law of contradiction (including Protagoras) in *Met.* 1005 b 23–25 (DK 22 A 7, I.145.32–33), 1010 a 10–15, 1062 a 31–34, and 1063 b 23–25. Yet, it is generally recognized that Aristotle has the argument of the *Theaetetus* in mind in that discussion. Following Aristotle, the ancient commentators sometimes mention Heraclitus along with Protagoras: Alex. *Aphr. In Arist. Met.* 239.2 Hayduck (*ad* Γ Prooemium), 271.32–272.2 (*ad* 1005 b 35), 652.19–20 (*ad* 1062 b 2); Ascl. *In Arist. Met.* 224.10–12 Hayduck (*ad* 1003 a 21), and Philop. *In Arist. De an.* 87.14–15 Hayduck (*ad* 405 a 25).

³⁷ Burnyeat 1976a, 46 n. 3, comments on this passage: “the only exception to a uniformly subjectivist record seems to be Cicero, *Academica* II 142, which means that the Academic Sceptic whom Cicero is reproducing (probably Clitomachus or Philo of Larissa) took the trouble to state Protagoras' view correctly”.

³⁸ Cp. *Adv. Math.* 7.48, 60–64, 369, 388–390; in 7.48 Sextus mentions Xenophanes, Xenias, Anacharsis, Dionysodorus, Gorgias, Metrodorus, Anaxarchus, and Monimus, together with Protagoras.

mentioned does not admit the existence either of anything being by itself (absolutely real) or of falsehood. SE *Adv. Math.* 7.64

We should also remember that Sextus, unlike Diogenes Laertius and Philostratus, is so generous as to include the *doctrines* of Gorgias, in particular his *On What Is Not* (DK 82 B 1–5, II.279.19–284.10), in dogmatic *philosophy*.

2.2. Protagoras the Sophist

Next let us take a further look at Protagoras as a sophist. The anecdote that Democritus discovered the talent of Protagoras and taught him to be a sophist was known to ancient writers (Diogenes Laertius, Aulus Gellius),³⁹ from or through Epicurus' letter *On professions* (Περὶ ἐπιτηδεύματων).⁴⁰

Diogenes Laertius reports as follows:

[15]

οὗτος πρῶτος μισθὸν εἰσεπράξατο μνᾶς ἑκατόν· καὶ πρῶτος μέρη χρόνου διώρισε καὶ καιροῦ δύναμιν ἐξέθετο καὶ λόγων ἀγῶνας ἐποιήσατο καὶ σοφίσματα τοῖς πραγματολογοῦσι προσήγαγε· καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν ἀφείς πρὸς τοῦνομα διελέχθη καὶ τὸ νῦν ἐπιπόλαιον γένος τῶν ἐριστικῶν ἐγέννησεν.

He was the first to exact a fee of a hundred minae and the first to mark off parts of time and bring out the importance of seizing the right moment, to institute contests in debating, and to teach rival pleaders sophistic arguments. Furthermore, in his dialectic he neglected the meaning in favour of verbal quibbling, and he was the father of the whole tribe of eristical disputants now so much in evidence. DL 9.52 (DK 80 A 1, II.254.1–4)

He used sophisms (σοφίσματα), and was the father of eristics (ἐριστικοί). Diogenes also introduces the famous anecdote of the controversy with his pupil Euathlus at the trial over teaching fees (9.56, DK 80 A 1, II.255.12–14).⁴¹ He is reported to have practiced as a sophist (σοφιστεῦσαι) for forty years (9.56, DK 80 A 1, II.255.8–10).⁴²

³⁹ DL 9.53 (DK 80 A 1, II.254.12–13); Gell. *Noct. Att.* 5.3 (DK 80 A 1, II.254, Anm. 10).

⁴⁰ Athen. *Deipn.* 8.50, 354 C (DK 68 A 9, II.85.28–32; fr. 17 Usener); cp. DL 10.8 (DK 68 A 53, II.98.19). The popular interpretation in the twentieth century of Diogenes Laertius 10.8, i.e., that Epicurus in that letter attacks many philosophers, is convincingly refuted by Sedley 1977: the list of deprecating qualifications of other philosophers (ibid.) comes from Timocrates, the severest critic of Epicurus.

⁴¹ A full version is found in Gell. *Noct. Att.* 5.10 (DK 80 B 6, II.266, Anm. 10), and Apuleius, *Florida* 18 (cp. DK 80 A 4, II.256.11–12); see also Syrianus *Comm. in Hermog. De statibus* 42, 2.42.1–10 Rabe.

⁴² The report is from Apollodorus (244 fr. 71 *FGrHist*), probably based on Plato *Meno* 91 D 2–E 9 (DK 80 A 8, II.257.3–10).

Flavius Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists*, also includes Protagoras in the list of the ‘Older Sophists’, and introduces his brief biography.⁴³ But the report is not as long or as impressive as that of Gorgias, whom Philostratus calls the “father of the sophist’s art”.⁴⁴ Philostratus is himself a sophist and protagonist of the Second Sophistic, so that he defends and praises the profession of sophists:

[16]

τὸ δὲ μισθοῦ διαλέγεσθαι πρῶτος εὔρε, πρῶτος δὲ παρέδωκεν Ἑλλήσι, πρᾶγμα οὐ μεμπτόν· ἃ γὰρ σὺν δαπάνῃ σπουδάζομεν, μᾶλλον ἀσπαζόμεθα τῶν προίκα.

He was the first to take a fee for argument and to introduce it among the Greeks. He merits no reproach on this account, for we are more enthusiastic about pursuits which cost us money than about those which cost us nothing.

Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 1.494.27–30 (DK 80 A 2, II.255.29–31: cp. [3])

Although sophists are given a higher cultural role in the Second Sophistic than in the Platonic tradition we inherit, it should be remembered that our standard list of the ‘Older Sophists’ (as found in, e.g., Diels-Kranz) comes from Philostratus’ *Lives*.⁴⁵ Whenever later ancient writers mentioned ‘sophists’, they seem to have had mainly Plato’s dialogues in mind, since those named are mostly Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, and Prodicus (sometimes Thrasymachus and Polus are added).⁴⁶ This may indicate how influential the image created by Plato was.⁴⁷

Thus Protagoras belongs to both traditions of the sophists and of the philosophers. Interestingly, Photius (ninth century AD) in his bibliographical list of Stobaeus, mentioned Protagoras both in the list of philosophers and in that of rhetoricians.⁴⁸

⁴³ Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 1.10.1–4 (DK 80 A 2, II.255.17–34).

⁴⁴ *Vit. Soph.* 1.9.1 (DK 82 A 1, II.271.24).

⁴⁵ With the notable inclusion of Critias, and exclusion of Polycrates, Alcidas, and Isocrates.

⁴⁶ E.g., Cic. *Brutus* 8.30: *Leontinus Gorgias, Thrasymachus Calchedonius, Protagoras Abderites, Prodicus Ceius, Hippias Eleius*; *ibid.* 85.292, and Libanius, *Apologia Socratis* 22, *De Socratis silentio* 24–25. On the other hand, later sophists were scarcely mentioned along with these older sophists.

⁴⁷ But Cicero’s reference in *De Oratore* 3.32.128 (DK 84 B 3, II.316.17–19; 85 A 9, II.320.16–18) suggests that rhetoricians are not distinguished from natural philosophers.

⁴⁸ Photius *Bibl.* 167, 114 b 17 (φιλόσοφοι) and 115 a 34 (ρήτορες).

3. THE *HOMO MENSURA* THESIS IN DOXOGRAPHY

Whenever Protagoras was treated (and respected) as an important contributor to rhetoric and argumentation, his doctrines, above all the *homo mensura* thesis, were often discussed by philosophers. But the way in which it was treated betrays its ambivalent position in philosophy. His relativist claim intends to subvert philosophy and escapes philosophical discussion. This makes clear why Plato severely criticizes Protagoras as a sophist, i.e., an anti-philosopher.

The *homo mensura* thesis was presented in the beginning of his main treatise *Truth*:⁴⁹

[17]

πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ (or μὴ) ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν. DK 80 B 1, II.263.3–5, 9–10

The testimonies to reconstruct this fragment are of three kinds:

- (1) The full form is quoted in Plato *Tht.* 152 A 2–4 (DK 80 B 1, II.263.9–10), SE *Pyrrh. Hyp.* 1.216 (DK 80 A 14, II.258.16–18), *Adv. Math.* 7.60, (DK 80 B 1, II.263.3–5), DL 9.51 (DK 80 A 1, II.253.26), and Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 14.20.2; only Plato reports “μή” instead of “οὐκ”.
- (2) The first, main part is reported in Plato *Crat.* 385 E 6–386 A 1 (DK 80 A 13, II.258.13–14), Arist. *Met.* 1062 b 12–14 (DK 80 A 19, II.259.34–35), Proclus *In Plat. Parm.* 631.7–8 Cousin (17.3–4 Steel), and Elias *In Arist. Cat.* 204.14 Busse (*ad* 6 a 36).
- (3) Rough references are found in Plato *Tht.* 170 E 7–8, 178 B 3–4, Arist. *Met.* 1053 a 35–36, Philo *De posteritate Caini* 35, and Alex. Aphr. *In Arist. Met.* 611.19–23 Hayduck (*ad* 1053 a 14), 652.19–21 (*ad* 1062 b 2).

This famous statement impels thinkers, both his contemporary and of later generations, to react critically. I assume that its essence lies in relativism: ‘whatever appears to me is (true) for me.’⁵⁰ But ancient thinkers discussed it

⁴⁹ The title of this work was, according to *Tht.* 161 C 4, ‘Truth’ (Ἀλήθεια), according to the Anonymous Commentator on Plato’s *Theaetetus* ‘On Truth’ (col. 2.5–7 Sedley & Bastianini, τῶι συγγράμματι τῶι Πρωταγόρου | τῶι Περὶ ἀληθείας; 60.34–36 τῶι Πει[ρί] ἀληθεί[α]ς συγ[γ]ράμματι), and according to SE *Adv. Math.* 7.60 ‘Down-Throwers’ (Καταβάλλοντες).

⁵⁰ Fine 1998a, 1998b, and 1994 argues against Burnyeat, that Protagoras’ *homo mensura* thesis presents not relativism, but infallibilism. By concentrating on Plato’s arguments against the thesis in the *Theaetetus*, she proposes an interpretation of the historical Protagoras. However, she dismisses some important testimonies on relativism (to be discussed below), in

in three simplified forms: ‘no more this than that’, ‘all appearances are true’, and ‘all things are relative’.

3.1. ‘No More This Than That’

Possibly already in his lifetime, Protagoras’ thesis was criticized by Democritus, his younger compatriot. Diogenes testifies that Democritus refers to Protagoras:

[18]

μέννηται ... καὶ Πρωταγόρου τοῦ Ἀβδηρίτου, ὃς ὁμολογεῖται κατὰ Σωκράτην γεγενῆσθαι.

He also mentions Protagoras of Abdera, who, it is admitted, was a contemporary of Socrates.

DL 9.42 (DK 68 A 1, II.83.16–19)

According to Sextus, Democritus’ target was the *homo mensura* thesis.

[19]

πάσαν μὲν οὖν φαντασίαν οὐκ ἂν εἴποι τις ἀληθῆ διὰ τὴν περιτροπὴν, καθὼς ὁ τε Δημόκριτος καὶ ὁ Πλάτων ἀντιλέγοντες τῷ Πρωταγόρᾳ ἐδίδασκον.

One cannot say that every appearance is true, because of the reversal involved, as Democritus and Plato taught in opposing Protagoras.

SE *Adv. Math.* 7.389 (DK 68 A 114, II.111.15–17; cp. A 8, II.85.26–27)

Since this no doubt refers to Plato’s *Theaetetus* 170 E 6–171 A 5 (cp. DK 80 A 15, II.258.37) and *Euthydemus* 286 B 8–C 4 (DK 80 A 19, II.259.24–27), Democritus may well have used a similar sort of argument, which is later called ‘reversal’ (περιτροπή).⁵¹

Plutarch gives us another testimony:

[20]

ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτόν γε Δημόκριτος ἀποδεῖ τοῦ νομίζειν μὴ μᾶλλον εἶναι τοῖον ἢ τοῖον τῶν πραγμάτων ἕκαστον, ὥστε Πρωταγόρᾳ τῷ σοφιστῇ τοῦτο εἰπόντι μεμαχηθῆσθαι καὶ γεγραφέναι πολλὰ καὶ πιθανὰ πρὸς αὐτόν.

addition to several crucial passages in Plato. She also argues as if Protagoras himself requires the ontology of Heraclitus to establish his infallibilism, which is most unlikely (see note 36 above).

⁵¹ For this kind of argument, see Burnyeat 1976a and 1976b. Since Democritus’ own epistemology was probably sceptical, in the sense that all sense perceptions are mere convention and false, whereas atom and void are the only truth, Protagoras’ relativist claim must have been his major opponent.

But indeed Democritus was so far from holding that each thing is no more this than that, that he attacked the sophist Protagoras for saying so, and wrote many convincing things against him.

Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1108 F–1109 A (DK 68 B 156, II.174.13–16)

Although the context is polemical and compressed, I take it that Democritus criticized Protagoras' *homo mensura* thesis in the form of 'each thing is no more this than that' (οὐ μάλλον). Since the *homo mensura* thesis concerns measuring, it can naturally be interpreted in terms of 'more than' (μάλλον): each man (A and B) being the measure, 'something is no more P (to A) than not-P (to B)'.⁵²

A similar formula is found in one of Plato's arguments in the *Theaetetus*:

[21]

εἰ δὲ αὐτὸς μὲν ᾧετο, τὸ δὲ πλῆθος μὴ συνοίεται, οἷσθ' ὅτι πρῶτον μὲν ὅσω πλείους οἷς μὴ δοκεῖ ἢ οἷς δοκεῖ, τοσοῦτω μάλλον οὐκ ἔστιν ἢ ἔστιν.⁵³

[Socr.:] On the other hand, suppose he (sc. Protagoras) believed it himself, but the majority of men do not agree with him, then—you see—in the first place the more those to whom it does not seem to be the truth outnumber those to whom it does, so much the more it isn't than it is. Plato *Theaet.* 171 A 1–3

Here Plato may be arguing against Protagoras by resorting to the same form of argument as Democritus criticized Protagoras for using.⁵⁴ It is noteworthy that Hermogenes, whose view of correct names is influenced by the Protagorean relativism, uses the same formula: "the latter (sc. the new naming) is no more correct than the former (sc. the previous naming)" (Plato *Crat.* 384 D 4–5: οὐδὲν ἦττον τὸ ὕστερον ὁρθῶς ἔχειν τοῦ προτέρου).⁵⁵

⁵² Thus Aristocles (fr. 6 Chiesara, *ap. Eus. Praep. Ev.* 14.20.7) criticizes Protagoras for abolishing the distinction between 'more' and 'less' (ἀπλῶς τε ἀναιρούσιν οὐτοί γε τὸ μάλλον καὶ τὸ ἦττον). This argument may come from Arist. *Met.* 1008 b 31–33; cp. Chiesara 2001, 145.

⁵³ This short argument is discussed as 2(a) in Burnyeat 1976b, 177, 182–183. For 'μάλλον', see also 158 C 9–D 7.

⁵⁴ McDowell 1973, 170, sees this argument as out of the context. However, we can detect its importance if it is an allusion to Democritus on Protagoras.

⁵⁵ The same phrase appears again in 384 D 5–6 in some manuscripts ("post μετατιθέμεθα add. οὐδὲν ἦττον τοῦτ' εἶναι ὁρθὸν τὸ μετατεθὲν τοῦ προτέρου κειμένου βδ, add. οὐδὲν ἦττον εἶναι ὁρθὸν τοῦτ' εἶναι τὸ μετατεθὲν τοῦ προτ κειμένου T²mg", Duke *et alii*, 1995), but is omitted in Burnet's OCT, and in W.S.M. Nicoll & E.A. Duke's text in the new OCT.

When Aristotle critically examines the Protagorean thesis that all appearances are true (see the next section) in *Metaphysics* Γ. 5, he also appeals to this formula: “this is no more true than that” (οὐθὲν γὰρ μᾶλλον τὰδε ἢ τὰδε ἀληθῆ, 1009 b 10).⁵⁶

It is in this tradition that Proclus interprets Plato’s argument against the *homo mensura* thesis in *Tht.* 161 C 2–D 1 (cp. 166 C 2–9) in terms of ‘no more this than that’:

[22]

(...) καθάπερ ἐν Θεαιτήτῳ πρὸς Πρωταγόραν ἀντέγραψε πάντων λέγοντα χρημάτων μέτρον τὸν ἄνθρωπον, δεικνύς οὐ μᾶλλον ὄντα τοῦτον μέτρον πάντων χρημάτων ἢ ὕν καὶ κυνοκέφαλον.

(...) as in the *Theaetetus*, when Plato wrote against Protagoras, who claimed that “man is the measure of all things”, that man is no more the measure of all things than a pig or a dog-faced baboon.

Proclus *In Plat. Parm.* 631.6–10 Cousin (17.3–6 Steel)

As for Protagoreanism Asclepius also raises a question in this fashion:

[23]

πόθεν γὰρ δῆλον ὅτι οὐ μᾶλλον ἐγὼ ἀληθεύω ἢ περ σὺ;

For whence is it obvious that I state truth no more than you?

Ascl. *In Arist. Met.* 284.15–16 Hayduck (*ad* 1011 a 3)

It is not certain whether Protagoras himself used this formula, but certainly his opponents understood the thesis in this way. We must also note that this formula became a common device for later sceptics.

3.2. ‘All Appearances Are True’

When Plato examines the *homo mensura* thesis in the *Theaetetus*, he occasionally drops the qualification ‘for someone’ from Protagoras’ relativistic claim, and criticizes it in the simplified form of ‘all appearances are true’. It is still controversial whether Plato’s argument commits a fallacy of *secundum quid* or not, but after Aristotle this simplified form became standard.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ In 1009 b 7–10, Aristotle presents some arguments also used by sceptics (especially the ‘ten modes’ reported by Sextus Empiricus), and mentions the sceptical or agnostic position of Democritus (b 11–12).

⁵⁷ As contrasted with Aristotle, Plato tends to keep the qualification: *Crat.* 385 E 4–386 A 3, C 7–D 1, *Tht.* 152 A 6–8, C 1–3, 161 D 2–7, 171 E 1–2, 172 A 1–5 (of *poleis*). Although Schiappa 1991, 190–193 blames Plato for dropping the essential qualification to make it absolute, Burnyeat 1976b, 173–177, and Notomi, 1999, 192–197, 224–230, argue against this claim.

[24]

ἔστι δ' ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς δόξης καὶ ὁ Πρωταγόρου λόγος, καὶ ἀνάγκη ὁμοίως αὐτοὺς ἄμφω ἢ εἶναι ἢ μὴ εἶναι· εἴτε γὰρ τὰ δοκοῦντα πάντα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ καὶ τὰ φαινόμενα, ἀνάγκη εἶναι πάντα ἅμα ἀληθῆ καὶ ψευδῆ.

From the same opinion also derives the thesis of Protagoras, and it is necessary that both either are or are not the case equally. For if all opinions and appearances are true, it is necessary that everything should be simultaneously true and false.
Arist. *Met.* 1009 a 6–9 (cp. DK 80 A 19, II.259.33)

When Aristotle criticizes Protagoras (along with other thinkers) for violating the law of contradiction in *Metaphysics* Γ.4–6 (esp. 1007 b 18–24), I.1 (1053 a 31–b 3), and K.5–6 (esp. 1062 b 12–1063 b 35), his position is interpreted not as relativism, but as subjectivism or infallibilism.

This simplified form, however, allows doxographers to classify Protagoras in the same group as, for example, Epicurus, who insists that “all perceptions and appearances are true”, whilst admitting the possibility of falsehood in opinions. According to Epicurus, whereas sense perception *per se* does not err, opinions added to it often make for mistakes. In this type of infallibilism, the difference between truth and falsehood is meaningful and important, but Protagoras’ relativism, by contrast, denies the possibility of falsehood altogether. Yet, in doxography Protagoras and Epicurus are contrasted to two groups of thinkers: to Democritus and Xenias, who claim that all appearances are false, and to Plato, the Stoics, and others, who insist that some appearances are true, some false:

[25]

εἰ γὰρ τῶν φυσικῶν οἱ μὲν πάντα ἀνῆρῆκασιν τὰ φαινόμενα, ὡς οἱ περὶ Δημόκριτον, οἱ δὲ πάντα ἔθεσαν, ὡς οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἐπίκουρον καὶ Πρωταγόραν, οἱ δὲ τινὰ μὲν ἀνείλον τινὰ δὲ ἔθεσαν, ὡς οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς καὶ τοῦ Περιπάτου ...

If some of the physicists, like Democritus, have abolished all appearances, and others, like Epicurus and Protagoras, have established all, while others again, like the Stoics and Peripatetics, have abolished some and established others ...
SE *Adv. Math.* 7.369

The same three-fold classification reappears a little later:

[26]

εἰ γὰρ κριτήριον ἀπολειπτέον τὴν φαντασίαν, ἥτοι πάσαν ἀληθῆ φαντασίαν λεκτέον εἶναι, καθὼς ἔλεγεν ὁ Πρωταγόρας, ἢ πάσαν ψευδῆ, ὡς ἔφασκε Ξενιάδης ὁ Κορίνθιος, ἢ τινὰ μὲν ἀληθῆ τινὰ δὲ ψευδῆ, ὡς οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς καὶ τῆς Ἀκαδημίας, ἔτι δὲ τοῦ Περιπάτου.

If *phantasia* is accepted as the criterion, we must assert either that every *phantasia* is true, as Protagoras asserted, or that every one is false, as Xenias

the Corinthian declared, or that some are true, some false, as the Stoics and Academicians said, and the Peripatetics as well. SE *Adv. Math.* 7.388

Doxographers such as Aëtius⁵⁸ and Hermias⁵⁹ tried to give Protagoras a place in this tradition, to characterize his thought.⁶⁰

We modern scholars may condemn this simplification as inaccurate or wrong, but it may have been unavoidable for ancient thinkers to treat Protagoras' thesis in this way, when they chose to discuss it within their philosophical framework. For it was unusual (as it is now) to add such a qualifier as 'for someone' to each and every designation of truth and being. Hence, while we find a few examples where the qualification 'for someone' is correctly kept in the relativist formula, ancient writers generally cared little about it.⁶¹

3.3. 'All Things Are Relative'

The omitted qualifier was discussed elsewhere, not in combination with the simplified claim, but in terms of relativity (τὸ πρὸς τι), as we saw in Sextus (see [11] & [12] above).

⁵⁸ Aëtius 4.9.1 (Stob. *Ecl.* 1.50.17; *DG* 396.12–16): Πυθαγόρας Ἐμπεδοκλῆς Ξενοφάνης Παρμενίδης Ζήνων Μέλισσος Ἀναξαγόρας Δημόκριτος Μητροδόωρος Πρωταγόρας Πλάτων ψευδεῖς εἶναι τὰς αἰσθήσεις. ("Pythagoras, Empedocles, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno, Melissus, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Metrodorus, Protagoras, Plato: perceptions are false.") The information seems confused, when we compare it with Damascius, *Comm. in Plat. Phaedonem* 1.80 Westerink: Protagoras and Epicurus take all perception to be true, while Parmenides, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras mistrust it and take all to be false; Plato admits both. Philoponus ascribes to Democritus the claim that appearance and truth is the same: *In Arist. De an.* 71.30 Hayduck (*ad* 1.2, 404 a 25).

⁵⁹ Hermias *Irris. Gentil. Philos.* 9 (DK 80 A 16, II.259.4–6; *DG* 653.15–18): ἀλλ' ἐπὶ θάτερα Πρωταγόρας ἐστηκώς ἀνθέλκει με φάσκων· ὁρος καὶ κρίσις τῶν πραγμάτων ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὰ μὲν ὑποπίπτοντα ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν ἔστιν πράγματα, τὰ δὲ μὴ ὑποπίπτοντα οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσι τῆς οὐσίας. "But Protagoras tries to draw me to the other side, where he stands, with the statement: Man is the standard and judge of things, and whatever comes before the senses is a thing, but that which does not is not among the forms of being". This argument shows some similarity to that of Didymus the Blind and of Elias (see note 72 below).

⁶⁰ Moreover, the simplified claim that 'all appearances are true' is supposed to lay basis for Protagoras' teaching of rhetoric, i.e., the skill in making the weaker argument stronger: cp. Anon. *In Arist. Rhet.* 153.17–24 Rabe (*ad* 2.24, 1402 a 23–26).

⁶¹ In contrast to dozens of passages that omit the qualification (after Plato), we find a few exceptions: SE *Adv. Math.* 7.60, [12] above, and Cic. *Ac. Pr.* 2.142, [13] above, retain the qualification in the sceptic discussion. Alexander of Aphrodisias, while usually dropping it, keeps it in two passages: *In Arist. Met.* 290.35–91.1 Hayduck (*ad* 1007 b 18) and 316.14–15 (*ad* 1010 b 30). Finally, the Byzantine writer Nicephorus Gregoras (13–14 AD) retains it in *Epistula* 30 (101 Leone).

Sextus treats relativity as a consequence or implication of Protagoras' claim that 'all appearances are true', for every appearance is *relative to* a perceiver. Here is another common understanding of Protagoreanism: 'all beings (or things) are relative' (πάντα τὰ ὄντα (or πράγματα) πρὸς τι).⁶²

If we combine the relative qualifier with the simplified form, this may come closer to Protagoras' original position of relativism, but these two claims are discussed separately in each doxographical context. If we attach 'for someone' to every appearance, the self-refutation argument, though it was a common weapon of the ancient critics, no longer works against the Protagorean position. Nor is he to be criticized for violating the law of contradiction, if each thing is *relative to* different perceivers; this is what Aristotle points out in *Metaphysics* Γ.6, 1011 a 21–28. In this crucial chapter, Aristotle discusses relativity in the examination of the Protagorean position:

[27]

εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔστι πάντα πρὸς τι, ἀλλ' ἑνία ἔστι καὶ αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά, οὐκ ἂν εἴη πᾶν τὸ φαινόμενον ἀληθές· τὸ γὰρ φαινόμενον τινὶ ἔστι φαινόμενον· ὥστε ὁ λέγων ἅπαντα τὰ φαινόμενα εἶναι ἀληθῆ ἅπαντα ποιεῖ τὰ ὄντα πρὸς τι.

If not all things are relative, but some actually exist in their own right, not every appearance will be true. For appearance is appearance *for someone*. Consequently, one who insists that all appearances are true makes *relative* all things that are.
Arist. *Met.* 1011 a 17–20

Later the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus* describes Protagoras' thesis as relativity:

[28]

πάντ[α δ' εἶναι] ταύτ[η] | πρὸς τι ἔλεγ[ε] διὰ τ[ὸ] ρεῖ[ν, ὥστε] λαμβά[ν]εσθ[αι] πᾶν τὸ φαι[ν]όμενον [πρὸς τὸ] κρι[νον].

He said that all things are in this way relative because of flux, so as to take all appearance to be relative to the perceiver.

Anon. *Comm. in Plat. Tht.* col. 62.39–44 Sedley & Bastianini

The commentator immediately compares this position with that of the Pyrrhoneans: they also maintain that all things are relative (πάντα πρὸς τι), since there is nothing in itself.⁶³

⁶² These expressions are used in relation to Protagoras by Aristotelian commentators: Philop. *In Arist. Cat.* 103.31–32 Busse (πάντα τὰ πράγματα πρὸς τι), Ammonius *In Arist. Cat.* 66.26–27 Busse (πάντα πρὸς τι), and Elias *In Arist. Cat.* 204.2 Busse (πάντα τὰ ὄντα πρὸς τι). All of them call him "Πρωταγόρας ὁ σοφιστής". See also notes 68 and 69 below.

⁶³ Anon. *In Plat. Tht.* col. 63.1–6 Sedley & Bastianini: ἄλλως δὲ πάντα πρὸς | τί φασι οἱ Πυρρώνειοι, καθ' ὃ οὐδὲν καθ' αὐτό ἔστιν, πάντα δὲ | πρὸς ἄλλα [θ]εωρεῖται.

It was Plato who first used the expression ‘πρός τι’ in relation to the Protagorean relativism:⁶⁴

[29]

ὥστε εἴτε τις εἶναι τι ὀνομάζει, τινὲς εἶναι ἢ πρὸς τι ῥητέον αὐτῷ, εἴτε γίγνεσθαι.

So if a man says anything ‘is’, he must say it is *to* or *of* or *in relation to* something, and similarly if he says it ‘becomes’.

Plato *Tht.* 160 B 8–10

We should bear in mind that Plato distinguishes between ‘in itself’ (καθ’ αὐτό) and ‘in relation to something’ (πρὸς τι), mainly in order to contrast Eleatic stability with Heraclitean flux.⁶⁵ To insist that ‘all things are relative’ is to reject absolute realities (τὰ καθ’ αὐτὰ ὑποκείμενα) altogether, as Sextus explains.⁶⁶ Thus, Philoponus argues against Protagoras’ position that nothing has a definite nature (ὠρισμένη φύσις).⁶⁷

However, like Sextus Empiricus, Asclepius connects relativity to the Protagorean notion of appearance in his *Metaphysics* commentary:

[30]

τὸ γὰρ φαινόμενόν τινι ἐστὶ φαινόμενον· ὥστε ὁ λέγων ἅπαντα τὰ φαινόμενα εἶναι ἀληθῆ ἅπαντα ποιεῖ τὰ ὄντα πρὸς τι.

For what appears, appears to someone. Therefore, one who insists that all appearances are true makes all beings relative.

Ascl. *In Arist. Met.* 285.27–29 Hayduck (*ad* Γ.6, 1011 a 13)

On the other hand, ancient commentators discussed relativity as a criterion of Protagoreanism quite independently of relativism. They mention Protagoras mostly in the context of discussing the Aristotelian categories.⁶⁸ He is

⁶⁴ Relativity is discussed in 152 D 7 (κράσεως πρὸς ἄλληλα), 157 A 1–B 1 (πρὸς ἄλληλα, 157 A 1), and 160 A 6–C 3; see McDowell 1973, 122.

⁶⁵ For Plato ‘καθ’ αὐτό’ is a crucial term to characterize the forms.

⁶⁶ SE *Adv. Math.* 7.64: καὶ τοῦτον δὴ κινεῖν τινὲς ὑπενόησαν τὸ κριτήριον, ἐπεὶ περ τοῦτ’ ἐν τῶν καθ’ αὐτὰ ὑποκειμένων δοκιμαστικὸν εἶναι βούλεται, τοῦ τε ἀληθοῦς καὶ τοῦ ψεύδους διοριστικὸν ὑπάρχειν, ὁ δὲ προειρημένος ἀνὴρ οὐτε καθ’ αὐτό τι ὑπάρχον οὐτε ψεύδους ἀπολέλοιπεν. “And this man, as some have supposed, rejects the criterion, seeing that it purports to be a test of absolute realities and to discriminate between the true and the false, whereas the man just mentioned does not admit the existence either of anything absolutely real or of falsehood.” This position denies any contradiction and falsehood: see Philop. *In Arist. Cat.* 103.33–104.3 Busse (see also next note).

⁶⁷ This is what Philoponus emphasizes: *In Arist. Cat.* 103.31–104.3 Busse, and *In Arist. Gen. et Corr.* 16.27–30 Vitelli; cp. *De aet. mund.* 11.14, 464.1–5 Rabe.

⁶⁸ *Ad* 7, 6 a 36: Amm. *In Arist. Cat.* 66.26–67.2 Busse, Philop. *In Arist. Cat.* 103.31–104.1 Busse (Capizzi A 19b), and Elias, *In Arist. Cat.* 204.2–36 Busse (Capizzi B 1); cp. Olympiod. *In Arist. Cat.* 97.22–23 Busse (*ad* 7, 6 a 31). However, Aristotle did not mention Protagoras in *Cat.* 7.

classified among those who believe that all beings are relative, in contrast to those (including Aristotle) who insist that some beings are relative (e.g., cold, large), and others absolute (e.g., man, horse).⁶⁹ Used in this context, the term ‘πρός τι’ does not properly explain relativism either.⁷⁰

The relation between a percipient (one to whom something appears) and an object (what appears to him) is one way to explain Protagorean relativism, but is in danger of reducing it to a specific kind of physical perception theory. Plato seems to pave the way for this explanation when he connects the Protagorean relativism with the Heraclitean flux theory. This commits Protagoras to a certain ontology, since the interaction between the percipient and the object is objectively determinable, and thus expresses a certain objective truth about the external reality.⁷¹ Protagoras would probably deny such interpretation, but this is how Sextus, for example, rejects Protagoreanism as a kind of dogmatism.⁷²

4. CONCLUSION: PROTAGOREANISM IN PHILOSOPHY

The relativism of Protagoras is still discussed by modern philosophers, as to whether it is self-refuting (or refuted in any way). However, this is not a mere philosophical puzzle, nor can it be easily dismissed as rhetoric. I think that it

⁶⁹ For ‘τὰ αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά’ see Amm. *In Arist. Cat.* 67.7–10 Busse, Ascl. *In Arist. Met.* 285.25–26 Hayduck, and Anon. *In Arist. Eth. Nic.* 153.23–26 Heylbut.

⁷⁰ Relativity and relativism are, philosophically speaking, different, and the former does not necessarily lead us to the latter (e.g., Einstein’s theory of relativity). The relativity involved in Protagoreanism is a special kind, i.e., ‘in relation to each perceiver’. We should note that relativity (i.e., ‘in relation to’, in contrast to ‘in itself’) is not necessarily to a perceiver, but that it may also be with each other.

⁷¹ In *Comm. in Plat. Crat.* 41 (13.10–13 Pasquali) Proclus explains Protagoreanism in terms of mixture of actor and receiver.

⁷² Also, from the combination of relativity and appearance, Didymus the Blind and Elias interpret Protagoreanism as a sort of phenomenalism. According to Didymus, it is unclear whether someone is sitting or not, when there is nobody to whom it appears (*Comm. in Psalmos* 29–34, cod. 222.19–22): ἀκουε δέ, διὰ τί εἶπον | εἰς δόξαν ἑτέραν οἱ Πρωταγόρου—σοφιστῆς δὲ ἦν ὁ Πρωταγόρας— λέγει, ὅτι τὸ εἶναι τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν τῷ φαίνεσθαι ἔστιν. | [λ]έγει ὅτι “φαίνομαι σοὶ τῷ παρόντι καθήμενος· τῷ δὲ ἀπόντι οὐ φαίνομαι καθήμενος· ἄδηλον εἰ κάθημαι | ἢ οὐ κάθημαι”. “Hear, how Protagoras’ followers came to a different opinion—Protagoras was a sophist. He says that for things that are, being is in being manifest. He says that it is manifest to you who are present that I am sitting; but to a person who is absent it is not manifest that I am sitting; whether or not I am sitting is non-evident”. Elias takes it that only things perceived exist, while nothing exists when seen by nobody (*In Arist. Cat.* 204.11 Busse, *ad* 6 a 36): ὁρῶντι μὲν εἰσί, μὴ ὁρῶντι δὲ οὐκ εἰσίν “to a person who sees, they are, but to a person who does not see, they are not”.

rather offers a radical challenge to the possibility of philosophy. Protagorean relativism may totally refuse, or escape, philosophical argument; this, in any case, seems to be why Plato and Aristotle had to appeal to dialectical arguments (instead of logical demonstration) in criticising him.

His relativism not only posits that all appearances are true, but rather abolishes the fundamental distinction between truth and falsehood. According to this position, since there is truth only, the word 'truth' is no longer meaningful. Thus, Plato sees in Protagoras' thought two major dangers for philosophy. If philosophy (as Socrates represents it) is the *pursuit of truth* and knowledge through arguments (λόγος), Protagoras' position destroys the possibility of philosophy altogether, since it tries to nullify both *logos* and truth. This is why Plato so severely criticizes him as a sophist, i.e., a 'non-philosopher'. Plato's confrontation with Protagoras as the sophist in the *Protagoras*, the *Theaetetus*, and (I believe) the *Sophist*, is prominent in historiography.⁷³ Above all, Plato was the only philosopher who criticized Protagoras as *being a sophist*.⁷⁴ Protagoras is the first sophist precisely in this sense.⁷⁵

As I have shown, Protagoras' thesis remained an important topic in ancient philosophy, especially in doxographical contexts; in the philosophical tradition, however, it was not properly treated—or even described. Ever since Democritus and Plato, the self-refutation argument against Protagoras has dealt with his thesis in the simplified form, thereby reducing Protagoreanism into something logically feeble. Relativity is discussed independently in the

⁷³ The confrontation of Protagorean relativism is not completed in the first part of the *Theaetetus*, but continues to be a main issue in the rest of the dialogue, and the subsequent dialogue, the *Sophist*. In these two dialogues Plato criticizes Protagoras' thought as the core of the sophistic movement: see Notomi 1999, chs. 6 & 7.

⁷⁴ Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* may seem to have little to do with his profession of sophist, since his *homo mensura* theory is included in one of the two main streams of Greek thinkers: he is discussed along with Homer and Heraclitus. Still the dialogue uses the words concerning 'sophist' at important stages in relation to his thesis: σοφιστικῶς, 154 E 1–2 ("in the manner of sophists, we'd engage in their sort of battle, and bash argument against argument with each other"); σοφιστής, 167 A 5, C 8 (in Protagoras' defence of his profession).

⁷⁵ Alexander, just before examining Protagoras, points out the danger of making the pursuit of philosophy impossible (*In Arist. Met.* 307.25–29 Hayduck, *ad* Γ.5, 1009 b 12): (...) οἱ φιλοσοφία προσιόντες ἀδυνάτω καὶ ἀκατάληπτῳ δοκοῦσι προσιέναι πράγματι, εἴ γε φιλοσοφία μὲν ἐπαγγέλλεται τὴν τῶν ὄντων γνῶσιν καὶ τὴν τῆς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀληθείας κατάληψιν, ἡ δὲ τῶν ὄντων γνῶσις τε καὶ κατάληψις οὕτως ἄπορος, ὥς δηλοῦσιν οἱ μάλιστα πραγματευσάμενοι περὶ αὐτῶν. "Those who approach philosophy seem to be approaching a task which is impossible and inapprehensible, given that philosophy professes its knowledge of beings and its apprehension of the truth about them, but the knowledge and apprehension of beings is so insuperably difficult, as witness those who have most treated of beings".

categorical theories, or in relation to a particular ontological scheme, such as Heracliteanism. As we have seen, his arguments have much in common with those of the sceptics—who, however, criticized Protagoreanism as a specific sort of dogmatism.

When Protagoras was discussed *as a philosopher*, his thought had to be placed along with other philosophical opinions, rather than being seen as a serious challenge to philosophy. The very tension as to viewing Protagoras as a sophist or as a philosopher shows his ambivalent position in relation to philosophy. Protagoras' challenge remained a potential threat to philosophy in antiquity anyway.⁷⁶

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⁷⁶ This is a revised paper read at the International Protagoras Conference in Leiden, in July 2007, and at the Seoul National University, in August 2008. Earlier versions were presented at the National Protagoras Society meeting, Leiden University, in November 2006, and at the B Club, the Faculty of Classics, Cambridge University, in March 2007. I thank the participants who gave me valuable and stimulating comments.

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CHAPTER THREE

MADE TO MEASURE: PROTAGORAS' *METRON**

Tazuko A. van Berkel

1. INTRODUCTION: INTERPRETING A PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENT

Metaphors create realities.¹ They are among our main vehicles for comprehending abstract concepts and performing abstract reasoning. Conventional metaphors serve to organize a world of unstructured experiences into concepts we can deal with; *new* metaphors establish new conceptual realities. They shape abstract concepts and make us capable of dealing with them, incorporating them in our world view and draw inferences from them. A good new metaphor changes the way we see the world: it defines reality by highlighting some features of reality at the expense of others and, by this token, forcing us to accept its entailments as true.²

One such a groundbreaking metaphor is Protagoras' 'measure' in his *Man-Measure* fragment (*MM*):

[1]

πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν.

Of all things the measure is man, of those that are (the case), that/how they are (the case), and of those that are not (the case), that/how they are not (the case).

SE *Adv. Math.* 7.60, DK 80 B 1, II.263.3–5

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¹ In this article the term 'metaphor' will be used in the sense of a conceptual metaphor, as defined by Lakoff & Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). A conceptual metaphor is a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system, i.e., the phenomenon of understanding one idea or conceptual domain in terms of another.

² Cp. Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1993.

Few sound bites in the history of philosophy have shared the tremendous success of *MM*, up to the point that what once may have puzzled the audience as a thought-provoking metaphor has become a conventional expression to us: we use phrases like ‘the human measure’, ‘the measure of things’ and take it for granted that ‘measure’ *is* a metaphor for something. We do not need to picture a ‘literal’ measure anymore; in fact, that would only impair our understanding of a fossilized metaphor we think we know so well. But as often, a metaphor we live by may turn out to be a perfect stranger.

One of the key strategies to deal with metaphors is substitution. According to a long and respectable hermeneutic tradition, interpreting a metaphorical expression, whether it is a philosophical fragment or a Pindaric piece of poetry, is tantamount to solving a riddle or a cryptogram: to explain the meaning of a sentence, one should simply substitute one word for another: literal ‘meanings’ for metaphorical expressions, transparent words for opaque ones, technical terms for informal and therefore underdetermined ones, unproblematic words for awkward ones that puzzle and disturb the audience.

This method of substitution presupposes a theory of metaphor: it assumes that metaphor is an abbreviated simile; that metaphors are essentially linguistic in nature (as opposed to conceptual); and it assumes a clear-cut distinction between literal and figurative language, by virtue of which any metaphor can be translated into literal language. By implication, this theory of metaphor reveals a set of assumptions concerning the nature of language and truth, often showing a commitment to a correspondence theory of truth, which defines meaning in terms of reference and truth, and presupposing that reality precedes language in providing us with a ready-made structure and categorization. This article is an attempt to demonstrate how this method of substitution has somehow impoverished our understanding of both Protagoras’ measure *and* its earliest extant interpretation in Plato’s *Theaetetus*. Although it is the central term in one of the most discussed philosophical fragments of antiquity,³ the word μέτρον has suffered neglect in comparison with the verb εἶναι,⁴ the conjunction ὥς⁵ and the nouns

³ For the analytical overview of the diverging interpretations of *MM* and its constituents, this article is deeply indebted to the ‘Forschungsbericht’ by Huss (1996) that is of great value for anyone interested in the reception of *MM* in the history of philology.

⁴ In terms of Kahn’s categorization (1973) εἶναι has been interpreted: (1) existentially (Th. Gomperz 1911; H. Gomperz 1912); (2) copulatively/predicatively (Buchheim 1986; Capizzi 1955); (3) veridically (Mansfeld 1981; Kerferd 1981; Guthrie 1969; Kahn 1973).

⁵ Thus far, the main lines of interpretation include: (1) ὥς as the conjunction ‘that’ (Th. Gomperz 1911; H. Gomperz 1912; Bernsen 1969; Mansfeld 1981); (2) ὥς as ‘how’ (Classen 1989); (3) ὥς as ‘that’ *and* ‘how’ (Untersteiner 1954; Buchheim 1986).

χρήματα⁶ and ἄνθρωπος.⁷ The reason for this neglect is that at first sight the term is not problematic at all—no need for substitution here, one is apt to think. Huss seems to be justified in his dismissal of allegedly new interpretations of the term μέτρον (*italics are mine*):

Es scheint wenig angebracht, bei der Ausdeutung des HMS von umständlichen Neu-Erklärungen des Begriffes μέτρον auszugehen; sie geraten allzu schnell zu *Umdeutungen* und bergen die Gefahr, den HMS unnötig zu verkomplizieren und damit seinen Sinn zu verfälschen.⁸

There is, according to Huss, nothing to be gained by a new interpretation of this term, i.e., by new substitutes that only make the sentence as a whole awkward, even more opaque up to the point of plain meaninglessness. The reason for this approach may be that at first sight the term is not problematic at all: μέτρον simply *means* ‘measure’. To give an indication of the extent to which ‘the human measure’ has become a conventional metaphor consider the following phrases:

- Money is the measure of all things (free translation of Aristotle, *EN* 1133 a 20–21, b 16–17).
- Well, actually, *need* is the measure of all commodities (again Aristotle, *EN* 1133 a 27).
- Time is not a substance, it is only a measure of duration and movement.
- Man is the measure of all things, of those that are that they are, of those that are not that they are not.

⁶ Three main interpretations of πάντα χρήματα have been proposed: (1) πάντα χρήματα as ‘everything’, ‘the whole world’, entailing an interpretation of singular χρήμα either (a) as ‘object’ (H. Gomperz 1912; Capizzi 1955; Untersteiner 1954; Buchheim 1986), or (b) as ‘fact’/ ‘state of affairs’ (Guthrie 1969), or (c) as an empty ‘filler’ to disambiguate the gender of πάντων (Sicking 1998); (2) χρήματα as qualities (Nestle 1941; Classen 1989); (3) χρήματα as things οἷς χρήται τις (Heidegger 1997 [1940]; Versényi 1962). The last interpretation is also specified to the extent that Protagoras’ χρήματα may (also) evoke more economic usages, such as ‘utilities’, ‘commodities’ or ‘money’ (Demont 1993, 44–47; Seaford 2004, 283–291). See Huss 1996, 236–243 for a detailed overview of positions.

⁷ Proposed interpretations are: (1) ἄνθρωπος as generic ‘man’, that is: mankind (Th. Gomperz 1911, 362–363; Seaford 2004, 289); (2) ἄνθρωπος distributively used as ‘individual man’ (Kerferd 1981, 86; Mansfeld 1981, 43; Classen 1989, 16); (3) ἄνθρωπος, collectively, as ‘group of people’ (H. Gomperz 1912, 217 ff.). See Huss 1996, 229–236 for a detailed overview of positions.

⁸ Huss 1996, 255 n. 22. However, acknowledgement is due to Huss who also points out: “Zahlreiche andere Forscher setzen die Gleichung μέτρον = κριτήριον wie selbstverständlich voraus, ohne sich näher dazu zu äußern.” (243 n. 10). Cp. Seaford 2004, 285–286; Dalfen 2004, 3.

Does the word ‘measure’ mean the same thing in all these examples? And if so, how can ‘man’ be anything of the same ontological status as money and time—or a yard, an hour, a dollar? And how can anything be the measure of things that are *that* they are, let alone of things that are not *that* they are not?

So how is it that this *Man-Measure* phrase does not seem awkward to us? My hypothesis is, that from antiquity onwards, notwithstanding the huge controversies about the exact meaning of the statement as a whole, there has been an implicit consensus that:

- we should not interpret μέτρον too literally in this statement, it is obviously a metaphor. Protagoras could have made his point ‘literally’;
- μέτρον literally means ‘measuring instrument’, but what the *Man-Measure* fragment *really* says is that ‘man is the measurer of all things’, which in its turn, *really*, means ‘the individual person is the one who *judges* all perceptual appearances’. Hence Protagoras was a relativist / subjectivist / sceptic / perspectivist / nominalist,

..., and then the discussion moves on to the question which of these philosophical positions can be rightly attributed to the historical Protagoras.

In this article, I wish to challenge these presuppositions. It will be argued that, although the meaning of the word μέτρον may be perfectly accessible to us, in the context of *MM*, we feel free to substitute, because we know it is ‘only a metaphor’. In particular, there is one influential set of interpretations of the *MM*, which yield an implicit substitution I wish to challenge:⁹ μέτρον in the sense of a judge, of a *criterion* of truth, a criterion of action, a standard of *judgement*, a ground for judgement—every single term overloaded with connotations which originate in modern epistemological discussions, such as judgement, the relationship between subject and object, and the propositional object.

2. LOST IN SUBSTITUTION: SEXTUS EMPIRICUS’ INTERPRETATION

The substitution of criterion for μέτρον can easily be traced back to Sextus Empiricus’ interpretation of *MM*:

⁹ Heußler 1888, 137; Seliger 1889, 408; Natorp 1981; Nestle 1891, 269; Koch 1970, 40 f.; Classen 1989, 16; H. Gomperz 1912, 203; Guthrie 1969, 183; Sicking 1998.

[2]

καὶ ὁ Πρωταγόρας δὲ βούλεται πάντων χρημάτων εἶναι μέτρον τὸν ἄνθρωπον, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, ‘μέτρον’ μὲν λέγων τὸ κριτήριον, ‘χρημάτων’ δὲ τῶν πραγμάτων, ὡς δυνάμει φάσκειν πάντων πραγμάτων κριτήριον εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ¹⁰ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τίθησι τὰ φαινόμενα ἐκάστω μόνῳ, καὶ οὕτως εἰσάγει τὸ πρὸς τι. διὸ καὶ δοκεῖ κοινωνίαν ἔχειν πρὸς τοὺς Πυρρωνεῖους.¹¹

SE *Pyrrh. Hyp.* 1.216–217, DK 80 A 14, II.258.16–21

This is a clear-cut example of substitution. In writing a ‘history of the criterion’, Sextus encounters a predecessor who actually came very close to the Pyrrhonic abolition of the criterion of truth: Protagoras. To facilitate a reading of the fragment along these lines, two substitutions are required: κριτήριον for μέτρον, and πράγματα for χρήματα. To Sextus Empiricus, these substitutions have explanatory force because both κριτήριον and πράγματα are technical terms and therefore accurately defined, addressing a well-known problem in Hellenistic epistemology: the ‘problem of the criterion’. In these contexts, the criterion is, roughly, something by which one can ‘sift’ (κρίνειν) items or instances from one another: in the realm of knowledge things that have presence from those that have not, and in the realm of everyday practice things we should do from those we should not.¹²

This interpretation of μέτρον as some kind of criterion is quite common to this day, although few scholars confine themselves to the Hellenistic use of the term κριτήριον.¹³ A modern criterion is a distinguishing feature in the *object* of sense-perception or in the *object* of pragmatic decision-making, constituting

¹⁰ Note that Sextus reads “τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων” instead of “τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων” in Plato’s *Theaetetus* 152 A 2–4. This may express a strictly defined ontological categorization of things that have presence and things that do not have presence: οὐ with substantivized participle indicates a closed set. Cp. Smyth 1920, 619. However, it should be taken into account that the quotation in *Tht.* 152 A 2–4 is reported speech, which may have repercussions for the οὐ/μή-distribution.

¹¹ “[216] Protagoras has it that human beings are the measure of all things, of those that are that they are, and of those that are not that they are not. By ‘measure’ he means the standard and by ‘things’ objects; so he is implicitly saying that human beings are the standard for all objects, of those that are that they are and of those that are not that they are not. For this reason he posits only what is apparent to each person, and thus introduces relativity. [217] Hence he is thought to have something in common with the Pyrrhonists.” Annas & Barnes, ²⁰⁰⁰, 56.

¹² SE *Pyrrh. Hyp.* 1.21–23, 2.14.

¹³ See note 9 above. In late antiquity too, μέτρον is frequently glossed as κριτήριον; Hermias even substitutes ὅρος καὶ κρίσις for μέτρον (*Irrisio gentilium philosophorum* 9, 653.16 Diels, DK 80 A 16, II.259.5).

a sufficient condition for something.¹⁴ At first sight, this interpretation does make sense: μέτρον would then be something that ‘marks off’ τὰ ὄντα from τὰ οὐκ ὄντα. Asserting that *man* is a measure in this way would then, somehow, remove the discrepancy between appearance and reality—or at least deny the existence of an alternative access to ‘reality’ other than appearance.

On second thoughts, however, it is awkward to call *someone*, the *agent* or *subject* of perception, a criterion. Can one say that ‘man’ or ‘a man’ is a criterion of something? And even though it is not *that* hard to make sense of what Sextus is doing here,¹⁵ we may ask ourselves: is κριτήριον more than a common denominator in a doxography? To what extent is it justifiable to substitute κριτήριον for μέτρον? Is this substitution a precondition for Sextus to interpret *MM* in the realm of relativism or relativity, as text (2) seems to suggest?

3. KRITÊRION

Sextus Empiricus was, of course, not the first to provoke a relativistic interpretation of *MM*. His substitution of κριτήριον for μέτρον, too, appears to have precedents. Guthrie¹⁶ finds support for Sextus’ substitution of κριτήριον for μέτρον in Plato’s *Theaetetus*:

[3]

(...) “πάντων μέτρον ἀνθρωπός ἐστιν,” ὡς φατέ, ὦ Πρωταγόρα, λευκῶν βαρέων κούφων, οὐδενὸς ὅτου οὐ τῶν τοιούτων· ἔχων γὰρ αὐτῶν τὸ κριτήριον ἐν αὐτῷ, οἷα

¹⁴ Cp. Hacker 1994.

¹⁵ In Hellenistic philosophies all kinds of entities can be qualified as ‘criterion of truth’: cognition, sense-perception, perceptual cognitions, cognitive impression. A closer look at Sextus Empiricus’ terminology reveals that his own definition of κριτήριον turns out to be deliberately vague (for doxographical reasons), and, in any case, different from our modern ‘criterion’: “Something *by which* one can sift” can, according to Sextus himself, refer (i) to the *agent* by which (τὸ ὑφ’ οὗ) one sifts, (ii) the *medium* or instrument *through* which (τὸ δι’ οὗ) one sifts and (iii) the judgemental ground *by virtue of* which (τὸ καθ’ ὃ) one sets oneself to sift (κρίνει), SE *Pyrrh. Hyp.* 2.16. So, though not self-evident, it is not hard to imagine that Protagoras’ ἀνθρωπος may have fitted in somehow in this eclectic collection of ‘criteria’. It may also be evident that Sextus’ use of the word κριτήριον is still far removed from a modern *criterion* (which is mostly associated with a feature of the *object* under scrutiny, as a sufficient condition for a judgement: see above).

¹⁶ Guthrie 1969, 183: “The word ‘measure’ (*metron*) was probably chosen by Protagoras for the epigrammatic flavour which it gives to his very quotable saying, and there is no reason to doubt that Plato, followed by Sextus, was right in explaining it as *kriterion*, standard of judgment.”

πάσχει τοιαῦτα οἰόμενος, ἀληθῆ τε οἶεται αὐτῷ καὶ ὄντα. (...) ἦ καὶ τῶν μελλόντων
 ἔσεσθαι, φήσομεν, ὦ Πρωταγόρα, ἔχει τὸ κριτήριον ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ οἷα ἂν οἰηθῇ ἔσεσθαι,
 ταῦτα καὶ γίγνεται ἐκείνῳ τῷ οἰηθέντι; (...).¹⁷ Plato *Tht.* 178 B 3–7, B 9–C 2

This passage contains the earliest attestation of the word κριτήριον, a term most likely coined by Plato himself. If we compare this passage with Sextus Empiricus' substitution of κριτήριον for μέτρον, we note that Socrates does not equate the two, but simply replaces the phrase '*being a measure*' with '*having a criterion in oneself*'.

Moreover, given the fact that the term κριτήριον is a neologism in this context, we should be careful of charging it with later, more confined or technical meanings. I will elaborate a bit on this neologism κριτήριον, because the point I will try to make resembles the case of μέτρον: new conceptions do not come out of the blue, they need to be constructed by an audience—in the case of metaphors on the basis of previous uses of the lexeme itself, in the case of neologisms on the basis of context plus previous uses of their *constituents*.

By the time the term κριτήριον is coined in the *Theaetetus*, the stem *κρι- has occurred in several different lexemes in the dialogue itself, such as κριτής (judge) and κρίνειν (sifting).¹⁸ The suffix -τήριον consists of the common *Kompositionssuffix* -ιος, expressing a sense of 'belonging to', and the suffix -τήρ, indicating agency.¹⁹ The substantivized neuter form -τήριον appears to be most productive in the formation of neologisms in classical Attic Greek. Compare Aristophanes' φροντιστήριον (thinking-place),²⁰ formed on the analogy of δικαστήριον (court(room)) and βουλευτήριον (council(building)).²¹

¹⁷ "Protagoras, you and your followers say that a man is the measure of all things which are white, heavy, light or anything of that sort; *because he has in himself the authority for deciding about them*, (...). But (...) what about the things which are going to be, in the future? *Does he have in himself the authority for deciding about them, too?* If someone thinks there's going to be a thing of some kind, does that thing actually come into being for the person who thought so?", translation McDowell 1973, 56 (italics are mine).

¹⁸ Cp. Dalfen 2004, 3: "Platon lässt statt des von Protagoras verwendeten Begriffes *métro*n = Maß seinen Sokrates den Begriff *krités* = Beurteiler verwenden. Damit hat er das Verständnis des Begriffes *métro*n im Satz des Protagoras in die falsche Richtung gelenkt, und es sieht so aus, dass es bis heute nicht aufgefallen ist, dass *métro*n im Griechischen nicht dasselbe bedeuten kann wie *krités*."

¹⁹ Debrunner 1917, 142–143.

²⁰ *Nub.* 94, 128, 142, 181, 1144, 1487.

²¹ Another Platonic neologism in -τήριον is attested in *Leg.* 908 A 4: σωφρονιστήριον, the house of correction. Cp. other neologisms in -τήριον in classical Attic: ἀκροατήριον (place of audience), ἐργαστήριον (workshop, manufactory), δεσμωτήριον (prison), φυλακτήριον (guarding post).

In the *Theaetetus*, as Socrates and his interlocutors are attempting to apply *MM* in a political context, the terms *κριτής* and *κρίνειν* have occurred several times by the time Socrates coins the analogous term *κριτήριον*. It is therefore likely that the neologism *κριτήριον* indicates a ‘place’ or ‘institution’ where *κρίνειν* takes place, a metaphorical parliament: we all have a *κριτήριον* inside us, where appearances are sifted into two classes and where decisions are taken.²²

4. KRINEIN VS. METREIN

This means that we would be misguided in attributing Sextus Empiricus’ substitution of *κριτήριον* for *μέτρον* to Plato. We should therefore not overstate the importance of this particular substitution in this early stage of Protagoras’ reception. Moreover, ‘having a *κριτήριον*’ is only one of the many substitutions, glosses and interpretations of the phrase ‘being a *μέτρον*’ in the *Theaetetus*.²³

²² This interpretation of *κριτήριον* is supported by *Leg.* 767 B 4–C 1 where *κριτήριον* is used as *genus* comprising, e.g., *δικαστήριον*. Cp. Aristotle (*Met.* 1063 a 3), who is the next person whom we know to have adopted the term *κριτήριον*. Aristotle uses it in juxtaposition to his *αἰσθητήριον*, perhaps in the sense of organs involved in sense perception and the processing of perceptual data.

²³ Between its first *verbatim* quotation in *Th.* 152 A 2–4 and its final refutation in 183 B 7–C 3, Protagoras’ *MM* is quoted or paraphrased over twenty times, and repeatedly re-interpreted (152 A 8, 160 C 9, 160 D 9, 161 C 5, 161 E 2–3, 162 C 5–6, 166 D 1–2, 168 D 3, 170 D 2, 170 E 8, 171 C 2, 179 B 2, 183 B 8–9). As Ford 1994 has persuasively argued, one of the subthemes running through the first part of the *Theaetetus* is the question how to interpret a philosophical fragment. At one point (164 E 2–7), the statement is called an authorless ‘orphan’, *ὄρφανός*, who, on the one hand, needs help to stand up against unfair refutation, but who, on the other hand, appears to be inviolable, precisely because of its indeterminateness: the *Man-Measure* fragment has no clear meaning, it requires huge interpretative efforts by Socrates and, contrary to sound statements in a proper dialectical debate, it appears to be impossible to make statements such as these unambiguous. Thus in the *Theaetetus* neither Socrates nor Theaetetus or Theodorus claim to have direct access to Protagoras’ authorial intention. From this we may infer that by the time of the dramatic date of the *Theaetetus* Protagoras’ *Alêtheia* (whether it refers to a book or to a written copy of an epideictic speech) was most likely lost.

In the continuous Socratic process of re-interpretation of *MM* the use of the words featuring in the fragment shifts too. This presents us with a wide range of more or less elaborate and explicit interpretations by a native speaker. Nearly every modern interpretation of the *Man-Measure* statement and its constituents is found in the *Theaetetus*: *ἀνθρώπος* used individually, distributively, collectively, and generically; *εἶναι* used predicatively, existentially, and veridically; *χρήματα*, frequently omitted in the re-formulations of *MM* and hence interpreted as an ‘empty’ word, but also replaced by *ὄντα*, *φαινόμενα*, *αἰσθητά*, *δόξα*, in terms of ‘money’ literally interpreted (167 D 1–2) and punned upon in the term *χρηστά* (167 C 1). This indicates that, although these interpretations may not be equally justified, none of them was felt to be

What may be of more interest is the fact that Plato increasingly glosses the phrase ‘being a measure’ in terms of the act of κρίνειν, sifting/discriminating.

First²⁴ μέτρον is replaced by κρίτης²⁵ and the phrase ‘being a μέτρον’ is replaced by the verb κρίνειν, ‘sifting’—a theme running through the *Theaetetus*, denoting: distinguishing sound philosophical offspring from wind-eggs (150 A 8–C 3), things-that-appear-so-and-so-to-someone from things that don’t (160 C 7–9), true appearances from non-existing ones, true beliefs, opinions and propositions from false ones (170 D 4–9) and true predictions of future cases from false ones (178 B 9–C 7, 178 E 3, 179 A 3).

In all these cases the verb is structured along the following lines:

- separating A (something/someone) from B, hence distinguishing A from B;
- picking out A (something/someone), hence choosing A, deciding in favour of A, preferring A.

These uses contain an element of privileging something *over* something else: in the first case a distinction in *two* categories is implied (separating A *from* B, distinguishing A *from* B); in the second case, something is singled out *with*

impossible by native speakers. Moreover, we may get the impression that the words themselves to some extent *allowed* for these interpretations, and that the opaqueness of Protagoras’ statement somehow *required* these interpretative efforts.

²⁴ In the first occurrence of *MM* (152 A 2–4) μέτρον εἶναι as such is not glossed at all (whereas ἄνθρωπος is disambiguated: ἄνθρωπος δὲ σύ τε καὶ γώ 152 A 8), but implicitly interpreted as ‘being the sole authority of’ (all things, interpreted as φαίνόμενα: as they appear to X, 152 A 6–8), ‘having private access to’ (all things, i.e., φαίνόμενα, αἰσθητά: see 152 B 12). The fact that here *MM* is embedded in a discussion on a definition of knowledge probably has restricted the semantic potential of the construction “being a measure that/how *fx* is (the case)” to an interpretation analogous to the construction “knowing that *fx* is the case”, “knowing of *x* that it is *f*”: ‘being a measure of *x* that it is *f*’. This requires an interpretation of χρήματα as *Sachverhalt* (*fx* instead of *X*).

Scholars are divided on the question of the scope of the Protagoras quotation, especially whether 152 A 6–7 (ὥς οἷα μὲν ἕκαστα ἐμοὶ φαίνεται τοιαῦτα μὲν ἔστιν ἐμοί, οἷα δὲ σοί, τοιαῦτα δὲ αὖ σοί) too should be taken as a verbatim rendering of Protagoras’ words. Inclusion of these words into the fragment is, supposedly, supported by a similar wording in *Cratylus* 386 A 1–3. However, close reading of Plato *Tht.* 151 E 8–152 A 8; 152 B 2–C 3 (DK 80 B 1b, II.263.6–264.2) points out that this is improbable. If Socrates’ point is to show the close similarity between Theaetetus’ definition of knowledge as sensation (αἰσθησις) and Protagoras’ position, it does not seem to make much sense *first* to quote the *Man-Measure* doctrine, which, apparently, does not evidently address the question of sense perception, and *then* to come up with a quotation which is evidently concerned with epistemological problems. The second ‘quotation’ would have been not only sufficient, but also more accurate and unambiguous.

²⁵ *Tht.* 160 C 7–9.

respect to something or somethings else—the point being, in both cases, not so much assessment of (the quality/truthfulness etc. of) *A per se*, but *A with regard* to others.

If we compare this act of ‘sifting/discriminating’ with ‘measuring’, we see some differences in logical structure:

- (1) The operation of measurement, in itself, does not need to involve more than one object. There are no binary oppositions implied, such as +/–, true/false, good/bad or cold/hot. Rather, measuring is assigning numbers to objects or phenomena according to a certain ratio, in terms of a certain dimension.
- (2) Even though a measurer may be a subject performing an operation on an object, a *measure* is not an agent at all,²⁶ but rather the conceptual means that enables comparison between the thing measured and the numerical system used to express the measurement results. Our concept of measure comes close to a ground of comparison, a *tertium comparationis*—which is, admittedly, a peculiar thing to say about ‘man’ in any event. This intuition is substantiated by one of Aristotle’s testimonies (*Met.* 1053 a 30–b 6) where he remarks that *MM* is awkward from a logico-semantic point of view.²⁷

Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that neither this act of ‘sifting/discriminating’ nor ‘measuring’ produces objects that can be bearers of truth-values. Sifting in the categories true/false is merely one particular type of a

²⁶ The standard dictionaries postulate a ‘meaning’ of μέτρον as a measuring *instrument*: most dictionaries list this description among the basic meaning, or even make it the primary one (LSJ). A closer look at these lemma’s reveals that besides the frequent use in Hellenistic and New Testament Greek and the *Man-Measure* statement itself, this use only occurs in two passages (Hom. *Il.* 12.422, Hom. *Hymn. Herm.* 47). Hom. *Il.* 12.422 provides the strongest case as two men are holding μέτρα in their hands (ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοντες); in Hom. *Hymn. Herm.* 47 Hermes is cutting stalks of reed in order to measure. In both cases (the plural) μέτρα figures as a concrete object instrumental in measuring; this use, however, is still understandable even without postulating ‘measuring instrument’ as a *basic meaning*. One Dutch dictionary (Montijn & Koster 1949) even suggests that this ‘meaning’ became current only from the 420’s on (!). It is very likely that the reason to add this description is *MM* itself.

²⁷ Unlike Untersteiner 1954, 79–80 Diels & Kranz do not include this testimony in their collection. As a matter of fact, few scholars take this fragment into account in their reconstruction of Protagoras. Due to the fact that Aristotle elsewhere interprets Protagoras’ *Man-Measure* fragment as a violation/ negation of the principle of contradiction (*Met.* 1008 a 28–30, 1012 b 13–18; cp. 1063 b 30–35), this testimony is often discarded as hardly serious. Cp. Elders on this passage: “Nevertheless it is remarkable that elsewhere Aristotle appears to take Protagoras more serious.” 1961, 78.

sifting operation. Measurements may *precede* an act of judgement in terms of truth-values (i.e., measurement results may be part of propositional objects) but do not have any truth-value in themselves—which is all the more striking if we bear in mind that *MM* allegedly is the first sentence of a text titled *Alêtheia* (cp. *Tht.* 161 C 4).

5. METRON: SEMANTICS

For analytical purposes I have, thus far, confined myself to an analysis of the verb *μετρεῖν* as compared with the verb *κρίνειν*.²⁸ Moving on to the noun *μέτρον* we can discern the following patterns in pre-Protagorean Greek.

The plural form, *μέτρα*, is used more commonly and allows of less ambiguity than the singular form. We see:

- the plural *μέτρα* is often used to indicate the generic concept of ‘unit of measurement’, as opposed to *σταθμά*.²⁹ When used generically, the term *μέτρα* can, variously, encompass units of capacity and volume.³⁰
- Besides this generic concept of *units*, the plural *μέτρα* can also refer to certain *magnitudes*: an aspect or dimension of the thing measured, its size, length and duration.³¹ From Homer on we find “the length of the road” (*μέτρα κελεύθου*),³² “the size of the sea” (*μέτρα θαλάσσης*),³³ or “of a harvest” (*μέτρα τοῦ καρποῦ*).³⁴ In most of these contexts, the point is not so much reflection on the exact size of the object, but the fact *that* it is very big, large and long: the point is not so much the exact size of the sea, but the fact that the sea is vast.

²⁸ I believe this to be valid from a methodological point of view: verbs contain more open places on a syntactical level and may offer us more insight into the structural articulation of lexemes.

²⁹ E.g. Hdt. 6.127.3; Pyth. DK 14 A 12, I.102.7; Gorg. DK 82 B 11a.30, II.301.26; Hippocr. *Prisc. Med.* 9.3, 128.11 Jouanna; Ar. *Av.* 1040; Soph. fr. 432.2 TrGF (*Nauplius*); And. *De Myst.* (1).83 (*psêphisma*).

³⁰ E.g., solid: Hom. *Od.* 2.355; Arist. *EN* 1135 a 2; liquid: Hom. *Il.* 7.471; Hes. *Op.* 350.

³¹ Hdt. 2.175.4; Eur. *Helena* 1532.

³² Hom. *Od.* 4.389; 10.539.

³³ Hes. *Op.* 648.

³⁴ Hdt. 4.198.2.

Turning to instances of the singular μέτρον we see a more diffuse picture:

- only in Homer do we find the plural μέτρα referring to a fixed amount of a substance, which implies that μέτρον, singular, itself is a *particular*, fixed *unit* of measurement. Precious objects, such as cauldrons and mixing-bowls are described in terms of their containing capacity,³⁵ and the audience is supposed to know what it means for a mixing-bowl to ‘contain six measures’ (*Il.* 23.741);
- much more common is the use of the singular μέτρον to indicate a particular relative quantity of something. In these cases, μέτρον is clearly *not* a defined and fixed amount or quantity, but is used to express proportions: “mix one measure of wine with two measures of water”.³⁶ We find this use in Hippocratic ‘recipes’,³⁷ but also in contexts of assessment of wealth and the administration of justice.³⁸ In these contexts we often find the collocation ἴσον μέτρον.³⁹
- It should be kept in mind, that the verb μετρεῖν often indicates the ‘measuring out’ of goods,⁴⁰ and offering compensation for services;⁴¹ the middle form, μετρεῖσθαι, ‘having something measured out to oneself’, meaning ‘borrowing something’.⁴² In these cases, the operation of ‘measuring’ is comparable to ‘counting’; both are discursive operations with the connotation of precision and accountability—something crucial in a more or less contractual deal between individuals. This use of μέτρον in the realm of proportions and proportional justice also occurs in cosmological contexts, where cosmic processes are described as following measured patterns, observing due measure and to be ruled by divine justice.⁴³

³⁵ Hom. *Il.* 23.740–743 Πηλεΐδης δ' αἶψ' ἄλλα τίθει ταχυτήτος ἄεθλα, | ἀργύρεον κρητήρα τετυγμένον· ἕξ δ' ἄρα μέτρα | χάνδανεν, αὐτὰρ κάλλει ἐνίκα πάσαν ἐπ' αἶαν | πολλόν, (...).

³⁶ Hippocr. *De morbis* 2.44, 7.62.9–11 Littré πινέτω δὲ μέλι, ἀναζέσας, ἐπιχέας ὅξος ἴσον τῷ μέτρῳ τοῦ μέλιτος, ἔπειτα ὅποσον ἂν γένηται μέτρον τοῦ ἐφθοῦ μέλιτος καὶ τοῦ ὄξους, ἐπιχέας ὕδατος ἐνὸς δέοντος εἵκοσι, τοῦτο διδόναι (...): “have the patient drink honey: after having brought (the honey) to boil, add (pour on it) an (amount of) vinegar equal to the measure of the honey; then, whatever the amount/ measure of the boiled honey and the vinegar turns out to be, add (pour on it) of water nineteen (measures), and give that ...”.

³⁷ Hippocr. *Acut.* 15, 2.346.2; *Off.* 13, 3.318.1; *Int.* 20, 7.216.22; *Mul.* 1.64, 8.132.20; 2.118, 8.256.8 and 21 Littré; Ctesias 688 fr. 68.3 *FGrHist*.

³⁸ Hes. *Op.* 350.

³⁹ Hdt. 2.33.2.

⁴⁰ Ar. *Ach.* 548, 1021; *Eq.* 1009; *Pax* 1254; *Av.* 580; *Nub.* 638 (the noun); Aesopus 105.1 (version 1); 110.1 (version 1).

⁴¹ The law quoted in Dem. 46.20.

⁴² Hes. *Op.* 350, see above with n. 38.

⁴³ Heracl. DK 22 A 10, I.146.20, Simplic. *In Cael.* 94.4 Heiberg; cp. B 30, I.158.2–3.

- This proportional use paved the way for μέτρον to become a technical term in Greek mathematics: κοινὸν μέτρον as a common measure, of things being σύμμετρος.

This sense of μέτρον as unit in a continuous rhythmical sequence is the basis for the use of μέτρον in the realm of poetry and music: singular ‘metre’,⁴⁴ as in λόγος ἔχων μέτρον (‘*logos* having metre’), as opposed to μέλος and ῥυθμός, and metonymically plural for ‘verses’.

- The connotation of precision and definiteness can also be found in more ‘limitative’ uses of μέτρον, where μέτρον is used as a normative term. In these contexts, μέτρον (of X) does not so much denote ‘any measure’, or ‘proportion’, but a particular measure, a ‘due measure’, indicating that there is a right ‘measure’ for something: mostly wine,⁴⁵ in which case μέτρον is meant to be restrictive (one should not surpass the measure that is due)⁴⁶ and is akin to the adjective μέτριος (with measure, observing due measure, being moderate), the adverb μετρίως (with measure) and the abstract noun μετρίότης (observance of due measure, the virtue of self-restraint).
- Akin to this ‘limitative’ use of μέτρον, there is the well-known metaphorical use of the singular μέτρον in the phrase ἥβης μέτρον ἰκέσθαι, which is roughly synonymous with ἡβάσκειν, ‘reaching one’s prime’, and the phrase ἥβης μέτρον ἔχειν, ‘being in one’s prime’.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ar. *Nub.* 638, 641; Pl. *Gorg.* 502 C 6; Gorgias DK 82 B 11.9, II.290.21.

⁴⁵ Ps.-Pythagoras, *Carmen Aureum* 33 (Diehl-Young 89) Pind. *Nem.* 11.47; Solon 13.52 West; Theogn. 475 (*oinou*), 479 (*posios*), 694 West; Panyassis fr. 13.7 Matthews (*potos*), 14.5 (*oinos*).

⁴⁶ With ὑπέρ: Theogn. 499, 502 West; Panyassis fr. 14.5 Matthews; Critias 6.22 West; Heracl. DK 22 B 94, I.172.9.

⁴⁷ It is this idiomatic use that has led Untersteiner to deduce what he sees to be the “fundamental” meaning of μέτρον: ‘mastery over something’ (1954, 80–81), taking the *Man-Measure* statement to mean “man is the master of all experiences” 1954, 42. Buchheim too draws far-reaching inferences from ἥβης μέτρον ἰκέσθαι, in that he finds a limitative sense in μέτρον: “Μέτρον bedeutet davon abgeleitet auch insbesondere den Punkt, die Markierung, an dem das Maß voll wird; es ist dies der Erschließungspunkt für einen ganzen Prozeß, die Stelle, die ihn insgesamt sinnvoll und verständlich werden läßt”, 1986, 49; which in turn has inspired some scholars to interpret *MM* as ‘Man is the limit of all things’, as if μέτρον were the same thing as πέρας. Cp. Seaford 2004, 283–291 who (along more acceptable lines, in my view) relates the limitative sense of μέτρον to the idea of projecting value and structure onto the universe.

Contrary to this well-attested opinion, I would like to submit that the notion of limit is not so much included in the noun μέτρον, but rather in the verb ἰκέσθαι. This is, I think, supported by the fact that in the expression “*being in one’s prime*” (ἥβης μέτρον ἔχειν) no such limit is implied—only definiteness: one is supposed to understand which *metron*, measure or *size*, is

This overview brings out, that there is little evidence to suggest that the Greek μέτρον is radically different from our ‘measure’.⁴⁸ Previous uses of the word suggest that it is perfectly legitimate to translate the term that way, which is not to say that this will bring us anywhere closer to an interpretation of the fragment.

What does become clear from our semantic survey is that none of the attested uses provides a ready-made interpretation for μέτρον in the realm of judging, deciding and choosing; the Platonic substitution of either κριτής or κριτήριον for μέτρον, and of κρίνειν for μετρεῖν, appears to be unprecedented. This is not to imply that this substitution was inconceivable: within certain contexts, the term μέτρον apparently *did* allow for this substitution. Nevertheless, the substitution of κριτής or κριτήριον for μέτρον did require effort and preparation, whereas in post-Platonic Greek it apparently became so common that we may infer that the meaning of μέτρον was extended in the way of a fossilized metaphor.

6. MEASURE AS A METAPHOR

The problem with *MM* is therefore not so much the literal *meaning* of the word μέτρον, but the fact that its literal meaning does not bring us closer to understanding the statement. As we have noted before, one of the interpretative problems is the reconciliation of the concept of measure with the dichotomy in the second half of the statement “of things that are (the case), that/how they are (the case), and of things that are not (the case), that/how they are not (the case)” —which apparently suggests *some* act of sifting.

But if the contemporary audience would have been confronted with this same problem,⁴⁹ it would have been *MM* itself that would have forced the audience somehow to extend the usual semantic range of μέτρον and to

meant. I would like to suggest a strictly literal interpretation of these cases: having or reaching the measure of prime means reaching or having reached a certain physical size that comes with one's prime: being a *grown-up*. It is not without reason that this expression is used in the valuation of cattle.

⁴⁸ In my view, interpretations that attempt to replace μέτρον by other terms may be equally obscuring as Plato's κριτής or κριτήριον. Substitutions such as ‘dominio’ (mastery), ‘Mäßigung’ (Untersteiner 1954, 42, Heidegger 1997 [1940], 119) etc. are equally reductive and presuppose that interpreting a philosophical fragment is tantamount to solving a crossword puzzle. Cp. Holland's criticism on Untersteiner (Holland 1956).

⁴⁹ For the thought-provoking quality of *MM*, cp. Buchheim 1986, 45–46 and Rademaker 105–106 in this volume.

understand the term as a metaphor for something. This ‘invitation’ to a metaphorical reading is confirmed by the fact that we are talking about ‘the measure of *all things*’, which means: including those we may not commonly be inclined to measure.

This brings us to the question what precedents we have for a metaphorical use of μέτρον. In lyrical poetry we find some instances of μέτρον followed by nouns such as σοφίης or γνωμοσύνης;⁵⁰ in tragedy we often find expressions as ‘the limit to misery, grief and sorrow’,⁵¹ or their immeasurability.⁵² Both are strictly speaking metaphors (for we cannot precisely quantify wisdom, pleasure or pain), but are natural extensions of everyday speech (for it is common to talk about wisdom or pain in terms of more and less, and of enough and too much). But even though this type of metaphorical application of μέτρον is quite common, it is not easy to see how it should have paved the way for the *MM* fragment.

If we concede that Protagoras is somehow using the term μέτρον in a metaphorical sense, which is very likely, it is *essential* for an interpretation of *MM* that it should take into account that in Protagoras’ time μέτρον was *not* a fossilized metaphor. Whatever Protagoras intended the word to mean, his audience did only have the previous uses of the term at its disposal. How was the audience able to make sense of this statement? I will now explore several cultural fields to enable reconstruction of the significance of *MM*.

6.1. *Due Measure of All Things:*

Wisdom Literature, Morality and Cosmology

MM can be positioned in a tradition of wisdom literature with its repertory of short general statements advocating the virtue of μετριοτήτης, observance of due measure, such as μέτρον ἄριστον (“measure is the best”, Cleobulus of Lindos),⁵³ μηδὲν ἄγαν (“nothing too much”, Solon),⁵⁴ and μέτρα φυλάσσεσθαι· καιρὸς δ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄριστος (“observe due measure: proportion in all things is best”, Hesiod *Op.* 694).

This ideology is shared by the lyric poets, e.g., in generalizing statements: σιγᾶν δ’ οὐκ ἐθέλουσι κακοὶ κακὰ λεσχάζοντες, | οἱ δ’ ἀγαθοὶ πάντων μέτρον ἴσασι νῆχειν (“the base, with their base gossip, refuse to be silent, but the noble know

⁵⁰ Solon 13.52, 16.2; Theogn. 876 West. Cp. one of Socrates’ interpretations of the term in the *Tht.* (161 E 2–3): μέτρον ὄντι αὐτῷ ἐκάστω τῆς αὐτοῦ σοφίας.

⁵¹ Eur. *HF* 1251; Soph. *El.* 236. But also in the lyrical poets: Pind. *Pyth.* 4.237.

⁵² Eur. *Tr.* 620, 722; *Bacch.* 1244 (πένθος οὐ) μετρητόν (1244–1245 *del.* Willink).

⁵³ Stob. *Anth.* 3.1.172, 3.112.2 Hense (DL 1.93).

⁵⁴ Stob. *Anth.* 3.1.172, 3.114.6 Hense (DL 1.63).

how to observe due measure in all things”, Theogn. 613–614 West); κερδέων δὲ χρεὶ μέτρον θηρευέμεν (“we must hunt for due measure in our love of gain”, Pind. *Nem.* 11.47); ἕπεται δ’ ἐν ἐκάστῳ μέτρον (“each thing has its measure”, Pind. *Ol.* 13.47–48).⁵⁵

At the same time, there is also an awareness of the human condition and its problematic relation to such measure: πολλοὺς τοι κόρος ἄνδρας ἀπώλεσεν ἀφραίνοντας· | γινῶναι γὰρ χαλεπὸν μέτρον, ὅτ’ ἐσθλὰ παρῇ (“excess has ruined many foolish men; it is difficult to recognize a limit, whenever prosperity is at hand”, Theogn. 693–694 W.); ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς πρὸς ἀνθρώπων βραχὺ μέτρον ἔχει (“brief is the span for men of opportunity”, Pind. *Pyth.* 4.286), and possibly an awareness of the perspectivism lying behind the ideology of μετριοτήτης: χρεὶ δὲ κατ’ αὐτὸν αἰεὶ παντὸς ὁρᾶν μέτρον (“one must always measure all things according to his own point of view”, Pind. *Pyth.* 2.34).

In their generalizing and thought-provoking nature these apophthegms form precedents for *MM*. They also extend the applicability of μέτρον, by starting from concrete and literal uses (the right measure for wine or wealth), and then generalizing to a measure of everything: πάντων μέτρον, ἐν ἐκάστῳ μέτρον, παντὸς μέτρον. In doing so, these apophthegms not only extend the applicability of the term μέτρον; they also open up possibilities for metaphorical use of this term, and may thereby have provided a stepping stone for Protagoras’ applying μέτρον even to the realm of being (so-and-so) and not-being (so-and-so). Moreover, in their awareness of the limitations of measurement and the human capacity to observe due measure, these sayings may have paved the way for the unexpected aphorism that *man* is the measure of all things.

More on the level of content, it is important to see how normative statements as these foreground a limitative sense of μέτρον. Through the concept of μέτρον they propagate a worldview in which balance, reciprocity and fair distribution figure as key concepts⁵⁶—a worldview shared by the pre-Socratic natural philosophers.⁵⁷ Claiming that reality is organized in terms of right measures is tantamount to grounding normativity in reality. Against this background, the statement that *man* is the measure of all things is to revert the tables by either annulling the distinction between the realm of reality and the realm of morality, or by denying human beings privileged access to the realm of being and a passage from *is* to *ought*. Protagoras’ statement could,

⁵⁵ Cp. Pind. *Isthm.* 6.71.

⁵⁶ Cp. Ps.-Pythagoras *Carmen Aureum* 33–38.

⁵⁷ Cp. Heraclitus DK 22 B 94, I.172.9 and B 30, I.158.2–3; Critias 6.22 West.

then, be read as an attempt to undermine the claims of the poets grounding their, mostly aristocratic, moral norms in reality. It's not reality that provides us with due measures; it is man who projects his own measures onto reality.

6.2. Measurement as Emblematic for Knowledge: Sense Perception and Scepticism

We do have indications that in Protagoras' time 'measure' had *epistemological* connotations. There are indications that in fifth- and fourth-century thinking, there has been a growing awareness that 'measure' and 'measurement' are concepts that structure reality in terms of quantificational units. A possibly significant example is the conception of time as a measure.⁵⁸

In early authors we already find the notion that 'to measure something' or 'to know its measures' is 'to know the thing itself'. We find such expressions as 'to tell someone the μέτρα κελεύθου', 'the length of the road', but which are meant to tell us more than the sheer size of the thing;⁵⁹ and 'to know the μέτρα θαλάσσης', 'the size of the sea' indicates knowledge of the essence of the sea.⁶⁰

Herodotus treats measurement as a species of autopsy in his frequent claims to have measured something himself.⁶¹ Moreover, his elaborate descriptions of objects in terms of their size⁶² conveys the idea, that to know the measures of something is to know the thing itself, and that to *describe* the measure of something, is to transmit essential knowledge of the thing. This connotation of measurement anticipates the μετρητική of Plato's *Protagoras* as an exemplary τέχνη when it comes to knowledge.⁶³

⁵⁸ Antiphon 87 DK B 9, II.339.26–27; Aëtius 1.22.6, 318.22–23 Diels; Diogenes Apolloniates DK 64 B 3, II.60.13.

⁵⁹ Hom. *Od.* 4.389 (μέτρα κελεύθου λέγειν); Hes. *Op.* 648 (δείξω μέτρα θαλάσσης); Hdt. 2.121a.2 (τοῦ λίθου δοῦναι τὰ μέτρα αὐτοῦ); Eur. *Alc.* 1062–1063 (ταῦτ' ἔχουσ' Ἀλκίητιδι | μορφῆς μέτρ' ἴσθι).

⁶⁰ The Delphic oracle to Croesus in Hdt. 1.47.3.

⁶¹ E.g., Hdt. 2.127.1. Measurement as starting-point for inferences: Hdt. 1.68.3, 1.93.3.

⁶² E.g., Hdt. 4.99.2. Cp. Soph. *Ai.* 5; Xen. *Cyr.* 8.5.3.

⁶³ I do not believe that the *metrêtikê* in *Protagoras* 356 E 3–4 conveys a notion of commensurability (of pleasures and pains, and, hence, of virtues) that facilitates a mechanical decision-making procedure in choosing between alternatives (*pace* Nussbaum 1984). Admittedly, the metaphor of the scales weighing pleasures and pains, and thereby additionally taking temporal distance into account, does imply decision making (356 B 1–C 1). But the *metrêtikê technê* is only introduced by Socrates as a hypothetical and perhaps counterfactual means to overcome the bias of sense perception: if only one could *measure* pleasures and pains, one would not be misled by phenomena of perspective (cp. Richardson 1990). This is of course perfectly *compatible* with commensurability (and hence homogeneity) of pleasure X with pleasure Y, pain X with pain Y, or even pleasure X with pain Y (presupposing the

This exemplary status of measurement can also be found in the Hippocratic treatises.⁶⁴ These texts thematize the impossibility of exact knowledge in the field of medicine, a field that requires specific treatment for each individual: μέτρον, together with ἀριθμός, being used as an emblem for this exact (quantifiable) knowledge. In doing so, these texts provide a meaningful epistemological background to *MM* and its reception in both the *Theaetetus* and Plato's *Protagoras*, in privileging bodily sensation over the accuracy of measurement, and in denying the attainability of accuracy in cases of individual variation.⁶⁵ This traditional conception of measure as a locus of essential knowledge may have provoked scepticism on the attainability of the level of accuracy commonly ascribed to measurement.

Moreover, the concept of measure appears to occupy an interesting middle ground between the realm of perceptual reality and an *a priori* structure. In its abstract mathematical application it is *relative* measure that is concerned: a unit in the analysis of proportions. However, geometrical *practice*, that is, the practice of land measurement, in the end requires some grounding in perceptual reality: one uses proportional reasoning to calculate the angle, the length of sides, or the area of squares that one cannot directly measure; but in the end, at least one of the variables needs to be actually *measured*, that is, compared to an object in physical reality, whether it is a measuring rod or parts of one's own body (cp. section 6.4).

This may have provoked Protagoras to utter the paradoxical statement that the alleged *a priori* structures that inspire confidence in measuring as a source of knowledge are actually human categories imposed on reality. This *is* a form of relativism. However, it is important to see that this does not resemble the kind of relativism, or even subjectivism,⁶⁶ Plato ascribes to Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*.⁶⁷ Plato, when interpreting ἄνθρωπος individually, seems to be concerned with epistemological relativism from a first person's point of

controversial zero-level), but that is not to say that the Greek supports this idea. If Plato would have wished to evoke the notion of mathematical commensurability, he could easily have used more specific technical terms. The evidence Nussbaum 1984 presents of an alleged foundation crisis caused by the discovery of incommensurability is seriously biased. Cp. Fowler 1987, esp. 289–302, 356–369.

⁶⁴ E.g., Hippocr. *De prisca medicina* 9, 1.588.4 Littré; *De diaeta* 1.2, 6.470.15 Littré. Cp. Demont 1993, 49.

⁶⁵ Cp. Dalfen 2004, 15–16, who also notes the affinity between *Tht.* and *De prisca medicina*.

⁶⁶ For an illuminating distinction between relativism and subjectivism, see Burnyeat 1976.

⁶⁷ Cp. Bett 1989 for a distinction between relativism in a 'weak sense' and a 'deep sense', and an argument that the fundamental opposition between relativism and realism or objectivism may have been a creation of Plato retrojected on the sophists.

view—which is radically different from an externalistic problematization of the nature of human knowledge. I will discuss this point further in section 7.

6.3. νόμος/φύσις: Measures as Tokens of Civilization

Let us now turn to the realm of everyday polis life. Although Plato may have favoured a type of μετρητική that involves only proportional units without physical extension, the everyday application of measures in Athenian life may also have inspired reflection on the nature of measurement and its relation to human reality. In classical Athens, the practice of land division, geometry's first and foremost application, alongside with commercial arithmetics had the connotation of 'democratic' mathematics.⁶⁸ This may give us an indication to what extent the concept of measure was a problematic and 'living' thing in Athenian society as a whole. Mathematics was intertwined with fifth-century Athenian politics.

Furthermore, in the light of the νόμος/φύσις-controversy it should be noted that 'measures', alongside with weights, numbers and the alphabet, are typically regarded as tokens of civilization. Foundation myths often feature cultural heroes who are said to have introduced measures,⁶⁹ which are presented as crucial to the survival and functioning of communities.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Cuomo 2001, 4–38.

⁶⁹ E.g., Pythagoras, according to DL 8.14; Hdt. 6.127.3; Gorgias DK 82 B 11a.30, II.301.26; Soph. fr. 432.2 TrGF (*Nauplius*).

⁷⁰ We have at most one related testimony that brings out that *MM* could be interpreted in this context:

Euripides fr. 578 TrGF (*Palamedes*), 5.2.598–599: τὰ τῆς γε λήθης φάρμακ' ὀρθώσας μόνος, | ἄφωνα καὶ φωνοῦντα, συλλαβὰς τιθεῖς, | ἐξηῦρον ἀνθρώποισι γράμματα' εἰδέναι, | ὥστ' οὐ παρόντα ποντίας ὑπὲρ πλακός | τάκει κατ' οἴκους πάντ' ἐπίστασθαι καλῶς, | παῖσιν τε τὸν θνήσκοντα χρημάτων μέτρον | γράψαντα λείπειν, τὸν λαβόντα δ' εἰδέναι. | ἃ δ' εἰς ἔριν πίπτουσιν ἀνθρώποις κακά, | δέλτος διαιρεῖ, κοῦκ ἐξ ψευδῆ λέγειν. (Text Kannicht, with Wecklein's conjecture τε τὸν θνήσκοντα for Stobaeus' τ' ἀποθνήσκοντα.)

"Alone I established remedies for forgetfulness; making consonants, vowels, syllables, I invented knowledge of writing for men, so that one absent over the sea's plain might well know everything back there in his house, and a dying man might write down and declare the measure of his wealth when bequeathing it to his sons, and the receiver know it. The troubles which befall men and lead to strife, a written tablet settles, and allows no falsehood to be said".

This fragment is of great value because of the juxtaposition of μέτρον and χρημάτων—here interpreted, as is very common for the plural form, as 'property'. It is highly probable that this fragment alludes to *MM*. In any case, it is significant that here too μέτρον is interpreted as 'quantity', *not* in terms of κρίνειν; and that 'measure' is associated with civilization and human achievement.

It has been suggested that Euripides' portrayal of Palamedes and the representation of his trial was meant to evoke the trial of Protagoras (Sutton 1987, 111–113). Although I find her

The everyday-life basis for this prominence of measures consists in several related contexts: commercial transactions, political issues of fair distribution of goods and land, of fair assessment of property and taxes. Measurement may therefore be not only emblematic for knowledge, but even more so for *accountability*. Moreover, the fact that the *units* of measurement and weight were established by *law* (cp. the famous Solonic reforms) must have prompted the idea that measures and weights are not only human inventions, but also items that specifically characterize the well-developed community.⁷¹

In this context, Protagoras' *Man-Measure* statement may have highlighted the fact that measurement, so intertwined with the democratic polis, accountability and fair distribution, is a human achievement—celebrating the power of law and culture over nature. Moreover, political reforms of standardization of measures among different cities may have raised awareness of the variation of measures and weights among different societies (provoking some form of cultural relativism) *and*, at the same time, of the fact that such variation need not be insurmountable (provoking optimism as to the possibility of translation and convertability).⁷²

6.4. *The Human Body as Measure of All Things*

One last striking feature of 'measure' is the fact that in ancient Greece linear measures were based on parts of the body: δάκτυλος (finger), πούς (foot),

argument as a whole unconvincing, I cannot understand how she could have missed using this fragment, with its collocation χρημάτων μέτρον, as evidence. This collocation is unprecedented for Protagoras, and extremely rare outside Protagoras exegesis. More in general, one could easily imagine the figure of the culture hero Palamedes as a stock-image for sophistic self-presentation.

The fragment closes with the expectation that the invention of writing will even solve strife (ἔρις). This connection of measures with civilization, consensus and concord was a commonplace in classical Athens. We may recall the politicized parody of the foundation myth in the Equality-speech in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, where Equality is said to have established measures, weights and number for mankind (541)—which is clearly meant as a provocative position in the political controversy over the nature of justice: democratic equality vs. aristocratic proportional justice. Moreover, by relating Equality to measures, locaste is intersecting another common distinction, between arithmetical (i.e., numerical) and geometrical (i.e., proportional) equality (cp. Arist. *Pol.* 1287 a 7–25; *EN* 1131 a 24–29). In the *Alcibiades* too, μετρητική is induced as a precondition for consensus ([Plato] *Alc.* I, 126 C 13–D 2). Both may have been inspired by Pythagorean thought on the peace bringing ability of numbers and numeracy.

⁷¹ Cp. Ar. *Av.* 1040–1041, probably a parody of the Coinage Decree (*IG* I³ 1453) from around 450 BCE.

⁷² Herodotus frequently provides us with conversion rates for Persian or Egyptian measure. E.g., 1.192.3; 2.6.3.

παλαμή (palm), πήχυς (elbow), κόνδυλος (knuckle), ὄργυια (the length of outstretched arms).⁷³ *MM* could then imply that every act of measurement somehow refers to the size or proportions of a human being. This strand of thought offers possibilities for a ‘collective’ as well as an individual interpretation of ‘ἄνθρωπος’:

- (1) It is an empirically observable fact that there is variation in the absolute length of the foot from place to place. The Attic foot, e.g., was approximately two centimetres shorter than the Olympian.⁷⁴
- (2) Within the same community we see that each building has its own standard measure, based on the body parts of the master builder in charge. Archaeological evidence shows variation in standard-measures between individual buildings in the same *polis* of roughly the same period. Each building appears to be based on a particular standard measure: the ratio between different elements of a building almost always is an integer, which means a fixed standard measure; however, the absolute length of this measure appears to vary among individual buildings.⁷⁵

These phenomena did not escape notice of the contemporary Greeks: tradition has it that the Olympian foot, being longer than the Attic, was actually the foot of Heracles. Moreover, in a work now lost, Plutarch allegedly records an anecdote in which Pythagoras was said to have deduced Heracles’ stature on the basis of the ratio of the Olympian foot to that used elsewhere.⁷⁶ This anecdote reveals an awareness of the peculiar nature of something used in everyday life: standard measures. They can be deduced to real human measures (e.g., a foot), but in everyday life they are *standardized*: hence, an Olympian measure, i.e., a measure used by everybody in Olympia. To sanction these conventional measures, appeal is sought in mythical semi-divine origins (*Heracles’* foot): it is a *large* foot after all. A funny variation on this theme is an observation made by Herodotus that the royal ell is larger than the common ell by three fingers.⁷⁷ Anecdotes as

⁷³ A precedent for Protagoras’ *MM* fragment, already pointed out by Dupréel 1948, 52. Demont 1993, 45 also calls attention to the variability of measures among cities.

⁷⁴ Although the absolute length of the linear measures differed from place to place, there appears to have existed a fixed ratio between foot and fingers, 1:16. Cp. Richardson 1990, 28.

⁷⁵ Heisel 1993, 177; De Waele 1985.

⁷⁶ Fr. 7 Sandbach (*Plutarch’s Moralia*, vol. 15, London 1987, 78–81) = Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 1.1.

⁷⁷ Hdt. 1.178.3 τάφος μὲν πρῶτά μιν βαθέα τε καὶ εὐρέα [καὶ] πλέη ὕδατος περιθέει, μετὰ δὲ τεῖχος πεντήκοντα μὲν πήχεων βασιλῆϊων ἐὼν τὸ εὖρος, ὕψος δὲ διηκοσίων πήχεων. ὁ δὲ βασιλῆϊος

these reveal an awareness of the peculiar nature of something used in daily life: standard measures.

Against this background, *MM* could be tantamount to saying that of all things the measure is ‘human’, or ‘the human body’—ἄνθρωπος interpreted metonymically. The practice of using body parts as units of measurement could, then, serve as an example for a conventionalistic position, potentially evoking both cultural variation among different communities and variations between individuals.

7. THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PROTAGORAS’ *MAN-MEASURE* STATEMENT: A JUST-SO STORY

The big question is: do these previous uses, contexts and connotations add up to a coherent and unambiguous interpretation of *MM*? Probably not. None of these previous uses formulates a ready-made question to which *MM* is a clearcut answer. In all these possible interpretations, it is somehow unexpected to say that man *is* the measure of all things. But all of these contexts should be taken into account, precisely because Protagoras’ μέτρον is a *new* metaphor, in which, by default of a definite and specific context, *all* previous uses somehow resonate.

The uses I mentioned do signal that the concept of measure is a ‘living thing’ in fifth century Athens, resonating with all kinds of reflection and controversy: the νόμος/φύσις-debate, political issues related to property assessment, taxation and imperialism, ethical issues of self-restraint, reciprocity and fair distribution, and medico-epistemological questions of the possibility and accuracy of knowledge. These contexts have created the conditions for the extent of metaphorization that Protagoras inflicts on the term μέτρον.

How did this process of metaphorization work? Reflection on the nature of measurement may be helpful. If measurement is the assignment of numbers to objects or phenomena, this assignment of numbers presupposes the countability of these objects. We need a concept of dimension, an *aspect*

πήγυς τοῦ μετρίου ἐστὶ πῆγχεος μέζων τρισὶ δακτύλοισι. “Around it runs first a moat deep and wide and full of water, and then a wall eighty three ells thick and three hundred thirty three ells high. The royal ell is greater by three fingers’ breadth than the common measure.”

under which something is measured. And that is where the concept of *measure* comes in: measure is the conceptual means by which two different entities can be compared in numerical terms.⁷⁸ It is the ground of comparison, the dimension in terms of which something is assessed or described.

Saying that *man* is the measure of all things does, in my view, *not* mean that man is the measurer of all things, nor that man is subjected to measurement, nor that man is the *measuring-instrument* of all things, but that man is:

- (1) ‘the measuring unit’ of every thing, that *in terms of what* all things are measured: like feet as a measure of length;
- (2) next, μέτρον shades into that *against what* something is measured, in terms of magnitude: time as a measure of motion;
- (3) next, even more metonymically, this use shades into the concept of a *standard* of measurement: if we say something is very big, we mean ‘big compared to ourselves’; i.e., we are the measure, the *standard*, of bigness. This is a line of thinking that fits well into the picture of late fifth-century Athens: think of the scene in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* where a flea’s performance (its jumping distance) is assessed in terms of the size of its body.⁷⁹
- (4) And *now* we are moving towards the realm of dichotomies: big/small, cold/hot, true/false—in which a concept of standard *as such* is presupposed. It is, I would like to submit, *MM* itself that created the very concept of a standard. This is exactly why in New Testament Greek the verb μετρεῖν can mean ‘to judge’, the noun μέτρον ‘judgement’.⁸⁰ This semantic development may be regarded as being *caused* by *MM*. And this, in turn, explains that for Sextus Empiricus, the substitution of κριτήριον for μέτρον may not have been such a great leap after all.

Possibly, travel among different cities inspired Protagoras to feed on common assumptions (faith in measurement as provider of exact reliable knowledge, token of cultural achievement, basis for justice, source of normativity), and to confront his audience with their own everyday practice: in the end, when we measure, we do so in terms of our own human bodies.

Protagoras thereby extrapolates the everyday experience of applying human measures when measuring length, to the realm of everything that

⁷⁸ Crump 1990, 72.

⁷⁹ Ar. *Nub.* 141–153.

⁸⁰ Matthew 7.2: ἐν ᾧ μέτρῳ μετρεῖτε μετρηθήσεται ὑμῖν. Cp. Mark 4.24; Luke 6.38b. But also: the *chreia* of a Aesopean fable as recorded by Syntipas (Fable 11): ὁ μῦθος δηλοῖ, ὅτι ἐν ᾧ μέτρῳ μετρεῖ τις, μετρηθήσεται αὐτῷ.

bears reference to human existence (χρήματα),⁸¹ and, subsequently, *even* to the realm of being and not-being.⁸²

That is what metaphors do: they are grounded in everyday experience and knowledge, and allow us to understand highly abstract and unstructured subject matter in terms of this more concrete, structured everyday experience. To coin a *new* metaphor is to create a novel concept. Metaphors do not presuppose unity; if anything, they *establish* unity. Moreover, metaphors do not bear on pre-existing abstract concepts; they create them.

8. THE PHILOSOPHICAL POTENTIAL OF *MM*: A JUST-SO STORY

Of course, this leaves the big question pending: is Protagoras' *MM* a relativistic statement? Before giving a tentative answer to this question I should stress that semantics and cultural analysis may not be sufficient to answer

⁸¹ This implies an almost Heideggerian interpretation of χρήματα as 'things people use (χρησθαι)'. Although I agree that in fifth-century Attic Greek, the singular χρήμα can be used as a mere 'filler' in a noun phrase, in its plural use the etymological connection with χρησθαι is easily activated. Compare Xenophon's analysis of 'what truly counts as commodity/good' (χρήματα), *Oec.* 1.8–12; or Aristotle's analysis of value and commodity (*EN* 1133 a 20–b 28). Moreover, the fragment from Euripides' *Palamedes* (see n. 70 above) shows us not only that the collocation χρημάτων μέτρον allows for an interpretation of χρήματα as property or money, but, perhaps, also that this is a very natural interpretation—especially when one thinks of expressions such as χρήματ' ἀνὴρ/ ἀνὴρ (see Alcaeus 360.2 LP; Thales DK 11 A 1.31, I.70.4 = DL 1.31; Pind. *Isthm.* 2.11). Cp. Fredal 2008, 166–167 and Seaford 2004, 283–291, who both read the fragment in line with the presocratic tradition of projection and deprojection of monetary value onto the universe: money as a conventionally established abstract value contributed to the sophists' awareness of the socially constructed basis of values and norms; Demont 1993, 41–44, who relates this use of χρήματα to the anecdotal tradition according to which Protagoras let his pupils themselves assess the value of his lessons (Arist. *EN* 1164 a 24–26, Plato *Prot.* 328 B 5–C 2; cp. DL 9.56). I agree that this suggests an interpretation of *MM* (e.g., according to which value is relative or socially constructed); however, I am inclined to think that this *ad hominem* interpretation is a product of negative spin and hostile reception by later authors.

I do not agree with views holding that χρήματα is a mere filler: if Protagoras wanted to say 'of the whole world', he could easily have said παντός; if he had wanted to say 'everything', πάντων would have sufficed. Nor do I believe that χρημάτων was merely a means to disambiguate πάντων (to be interpreted neuter instead of masculine), *pace* Sicking 1998, 173; if the saying 'man is the measure of all' were ambiguous at all, the second half of the sentence would have disambiguated the gender in retrospect: the combination of plural (and anaphoric) τῶν ὄντων with singular ἔστιν makes clear that neuter things are concerned.

⁸² Essentially, this leaves open which interpretation of ὥς + εἶναι is to be preferred. The quantificational aspect of μέτρον coheres, of course, more easily with an interpretation as 'how they are' (ὥς as 'how'), or 'that they are such-and-so' (copulative εἶναι with suppressed predicate). Still, in these interpretations, the fact that a positive as well as a negative counterpart are expressed, suggesting a dichotomy or choice between two items, remains awkward.

philosophical questions such as these in a conclusive manner. I do not need to lay stress on the scarcity of early sources for Protagoras, or on the fact that Plato's oeuvre presents us with an interpretative bottle-neck: to a great extent, the direction of the philosophical tradition is determined by Plato's reception of Protagoras' thought. As it has come down to us, Protagoras' *MM* remains heavily underdetermined.⁸³ Therefore, any assertion on a pre-Platonic Protagoras necessarily remains conditional and hypothetical. Studies in semantics and cultural analysis will not bring us conclusive evidence; they merely outline the limiting conditions for any interpretation that claims to be 'historical'.

I am inclined to think that Protagoras' position was rather one of perspectivism than of relativism: saying that measuring always contains reference to a human being may be a metaphor to indicate that we cannot but see things from a first person perspective. As humans we are bound to see the world in terms of a human measure.

We may compare his line of thinking to Xenophanes' criticism of the anthropomorphic conception of the gods.⁸⁴ Both may have started from the empirical observation of cultural variation to infer an awareness of the fact that we are bound to an essentially human perspective on the world. Both Xenophanes and Protagoras reflect on the human condition, on features of being human (*ἄνθρωπος*), in a generic sense. As such, *MM* may be reacting to a tradition of archaic wisdom literature and presocratic cosmologies: we may think that we can derive norms from reality, morality from being, and we may use *μέτρον* as a *trait d'union* between those realms, but reflection reveals that we are just projecting what we like to see as good behaviour onto the universe (cp. Empedocles' 'friendship and strife' as cosmic principles).

This reflection may have been *triggered* by the observation of cultural variation; and may in turn have *provoked* either scepticism or relativism—without necessarily *entailing* these positions.⁸⁵

⁸³ What is more, I find it highly conceivable that Protagoras' *MM* originally was intended as an underdetermined statement, at least in the eyes of Plato. That is exactly why Socrates and Theaetetus are going out of their way to establish the correct (*orthos*) meanings of the words used by Protagoras. Plato is obviously criticizing Protagoras for not overseeing the implications of his saying; but, perhaps on a more *ad hominem* level, he attacks Protagoras for failing to observe standards of correct use of language (*orthoepeia*).

⁸⁴ SE *Adv. Math.* 9.193, DK 21 B 11, I. 132.2–4; SE *Adv. Math.* 1.289, DK 21 B 12, I.132.7–8; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 5.14.109.2, DK 21 B 14, I.132.16–17; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 5.14.109.3, DK 21 B 15, I.132.19–133.4; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 7.4.22.1, DK 21 B 16, I.133.6–7.

⁸⁵ Cp. Seaford 2004, 289: "[W]hat is true of all humankind is also true of each individual."

Perspectivism only becomes relativism the moment infallibility comes in: if we can never be wrong there is no transcendental measure—which in the end cancels the principle of non-contradiction. But Protagoras did restrict the application of *MM*: the realm of the gods is excluded. The gods are immeasurable, we have no measure suited to apply to them. This does not necessarily preclude relativistic interpretations of Protagoras; but it may inspire us to some caution and give us reason to assume that Protagoras did not reject a transcendental measure all together.

The tenor of *MM* may have been a more positive awareness of perspectivism: travelling from *polis* to *polis* Protagoras may have noticed that every community uses its own measures as standard—which is an empirically observable fact. But it is equally observable that there is such a thing as a conversion rate between different standard measures; no infallibility is implied. If a Spartan says: “this thing measures three feet” and an Athenian claims it is four, sooner or later they will find out that they simply have different standards for the foot-measure, different meanings of the word—no contradiction is implied. It does raise awareness that we see things from a human perspective, and from our own perspective—but it need not imply relativism.

Protagorean relativism as we know it may be an invention of Plato's. It was Plato who investigated the implications of *MM*, by turning an aphorism on the human condition (‘being caught in a human perspective’), *both* into perceptual relativism *and* into a position favouring majority opinion. Both interpretations of *MM* are far more likely to be part of a Socratic/Platonic program than of Protagorean thought.⁸⁶

This is not the radically new interpretation we may have wished for. Nor are we enriched with new conclusive evidence that decisively favours one interpretation over the other. We may not have settled issues. But at least, semantical and cultural analysis have raised awareness of the fact that, whereas for us ‘the human measure’ is a conventional metaphor, a metaphor we live by, for Protagoras’ audience μέτρον was a *new* metaphor. Between us and Protagoras the metaphor has fossilized into a rigid conventional metaphor—and access to previous connotations, the resonance of previous uses and contexts, got lost in the process.

⁸⁶ Cp. Bett 1989 who argues that Plato's *Theaetetus* is “the *one* piece of evidence for relativism, in the deep sense, among any of the sophists.” The opposition between relativism and realism or objectivism may have been an invention of Plato retrojected on the sophists: see also n. 67 above.

Moreover, we may have increased our awareness of the plain fact that measuring and sifting, *μετρεῖν* and *κρίνειν*, are entirely different operations; and that *μέτρον*, *κριτής* and *κριτήριο*, are distinct concepts, having a different semantic potential as metaphors. History of ideas can be a messy business once we let go of the assumptions of teleological historiography: Sextus' *κριτήριο* is not the same thing as Plato's *κριτήριο*; nor is *κρίνειν* co-extensive with *μετρεῖν*; and neither Plato's *κριτήριο* nor his *κριτής* is an innocent substitute for *μέτρον*. But to compensate for this loss of diachronic simplicity, we may now have an enriched synchronic understanding of the semantic potential of Protagoras' *Man-Measure* statement. For to rush over distinctions like these would be to do injustice to both Protagoras and Plato.

APPENDIX: COMMON MEASURE: INCOMMENSURABILITY AND COMMON SENSE

Another context that may have informed the earliest interpretations of *MM* is geometry and the discovery of mathematical incommensurability. The position of *πάντων χρημάτων* at the beginning of the saying, it is suggested,⁸⁷ may highlight a notion of *commensurability*: a measure of *all* things is equivalent to a *common* measure.

I do believe that mathematical questions of commensurability have informed the early *reception* of Protagoras (e.g., Plato's *Philebus*) and may, with hindsight, have offered material for several apocryphal anecdotes on Protagoras in later doxography. We have plenty of evidence suggesting that Protagoras was associated with mathematics and its status. Protagoras was allegedly no friend to geometry: in the *Protagoras* he declares that he, unlike Hippias, does not assign any role to mathematics in his teachings (*Prot.* 319 E 1–5). In the *Theaetetus*, Theodorus declares (164 E 8–165 A 3) that he cannot be the official guardian of Protagoras' work, for his interest has turned away from *ψιλοὶ λόγοι* to geometry a long time ago—thereby implying that Protagoras was mainly occupied with these *ψιλοὶ λόγοι*.

What is even more striking is the framework of the *Theaetetus* (Socrates in conversation with two mathematicians!) and one of the moves in the definitional section of the dialogue: Theaetetus gives a demonstration of obtaining genuine knowledge, by giving an example of generalizing on the

⁸⁷ Burnet 1920, 111–118.

infinitely many square areas with integer areas but irrational sides (147 D 4–148 B 3). It should be noted that this probably is the first surviving explicit mention of mathematical incommensurability.

Moreover, one of our Aristotelian testimonies mentions a Protagorean attack on the geometricians, in which Protagoras is said to deny a special ontological status to geometrical objects (*Met.* 998 a 1–19). According to Protagoras, a circle would not touch its tangens in a point, but in a line. It has been argued that it was this allegedly Protagorean attack that Plato attempted to counter in his *Seventh Letter* 343 A 4–9. A similar example is used there to demonstrate the distinct status of geometrical objects.⁸⁸

Moreover, in one of the reports in Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, Simplicius mentions an encounter of Protagoras with Zeno, in which the two discussed all kinds of paradoxes and problems regarding the continuum.⁸⁹ Here Protagoras is made to deny that a ten-thousandth part of a grain will make any noise (that is: the ten-thousandth part of the noise a single grain will make). In both cases, Protagoras is represented as reacting in a common sense way to abstract mathematical problems and paradoxes that lead to counter-intuitive consequences.

In spite of this retrospective evidence of Protagoras' relation to mathematical questions, I would call for some caution in assuming that Protagoras' *MM* originally was a reaction against developments in geometry. We should not too easily agree with Burnet in following the standard story, shared by most mathematicians and historians of mathematics, that the Pythagorean discovery of incommensurability brought about a scientific foundations crisis and thereby struck the whole Greek world as a disgrace. According to this canonical story, one key problem with mathematical incommensurability would have been its postulation of irrational numbers, numbers that cannot be expressed as fractures of two integers. This, in turn, would have been a plain undermining of the Pythagorean worldview that 'all is number', and of the ancient Babylonian arithmetical basis of geometry. Babylonian arithmetics, according to this story, was rendered inadequate in dealing with phenomena related to incommensurability, so that geometry was in need of reformulation in purely geometrical terms.

⁸⁸ Cp. Wedberg 1955, 57–58. But see Pritchard 1995, for a (not entirely convincing) argument against this position.

⁸⁹ Zeno Eleaticus DK 29 A 29, I.254.29–255.7 = Simplicius. *In Arist. Phys.* 250 a 19, 1108.18–28 Diels.

As Fowler has persuasively argued, there is only meagre evidence to support these views.⁹⁰ It is telling that the earliest explicit attestations of the concept of incommensurability are Platonic: the *Theaetetus*-passage mentioned (!) and *Hippias Major* 303 B 1–C 6. Moreover, the classical representation of the discovery of mathematical incommensurability as a disgrace to the rationality of Hellas appears to rely on only one passage, in Plato's *Laws* (817 E 5–819 A 7). There is hardly any evidence to suggest that μέτρον was already a technical mathematical term in the late fifth-century.⁹¹

It is easy to imagine how later commentators such as Simplicius may have interpreted Protagoras' μέτρον with retrospect in mathematical terms. It may very well have been the representation of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* that contributed to his later image as an advocate of perceptual reality *as opposed to* a Platonic-Pythagorean attitude towards mathematical objects. Simplicius' anecdote, moreover, bears too much resemblance to Stoic and Epicurean doctrines on the status of mathematical objects to be reliable without further comment.

Therefore, I am inclined to believe that *before* Plato's rationalizing programme, incommensurability may not have had that much resonance in Greek society: it did not cause a scientific foundations crisis, nor did it pose a threat to rationality. It is therefore not likely that Protagoras himself has used 'common measure' as a metaphor: common measure only becomes a concept of significance once *incommensurability* is an issue. For the contemporary audience we can safely dismiss this option.

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⁹⁰ Fowler 1987, esp. 289–302, 356–369.

⁹¹ Moreover, one could wonder whether the term μέτρον alone, with all its other uses and connotations, would have been sufficient to evoke univocally a technical mathematical context. Why not κοινὸν μέτρον?

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CHAPTER FOUR

ΤΟΝ ΗΤΤΩ ΛΟΓΟΝ ΚΡΕΙΤΤΩ ΠΟΙΕΙΝ: ARISTOTLE, PLATO, AND THE ΕΠΙΛΕΓΜΑ OF PROTAGORAS

Michele Corradi

Modern critics have offered various, often conflicting, interpretations of the programme, the ἐπάγγελμα, attributed by tradition to Protagoras: making the weaker λόγος stronger, τὸν ἡττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν (DK 80 B 6). We may distinguish positions which place this programme of Protagoras in the development of his reflection on rhetoric, from others which connect it rather with the heart of the pre-Socratic reflection on nature and knowledge.¹ But ancient tradition, starting from Aristotle, agrees in presenting us with an image of this famous expression of Protagoras' thought clearly oriented in the direction of rhetoric. Before Aristotle, however, we find a significant exception: Plato, our main source of information about Protagoras,² offers us information, particularly regarding the ἐπάγγελμα, which differs from the rest of the tradition because it places the ἐπάγγελμα quite particularly in the context of the educational activity developed by Protagoras. I will focus here precisely on this singular dichotomy between Plato and the rest of the tradition (Aristotle and Eudoxus (1), and Aristophanes (2) in particular), conducting as detailed an analysis as possible of the data at our disposal.

1. ARISTOTLE AND EUDOXUS

In Book 2 of his *Rhetoric*, in the context of a discussion of apparent ἐνθυμήματα, Aristotle observes that eristic arguments may give rise to an apparent

¹ Schiappa ²2003, 103–116 offers a detailed survey of ancient and modern interpretations. His evaluation, however, is invalidated by somewhat debatable presuppositions about fifth century rhetoric; cp. Tulli 2002. An interpretation along rhetorical lines is proposed, among others, by Classen 1976 (= 1959), 221–226, Dietz 1976, 68–75 and Buchheim 1986, 12–18. For a reading in the light of pre-Socratic philosophical speculation, compare above all Untersteiner ³1996, 79–114 and Kerferd 1981, 100–105.

² Cp., for example, Adorno 1986, 48 or Brancacci 2002, 171.

syllogism due to the failure to distinguish between absolute sense and particular sense, παρὰ τὸ ἀπλῶς καὶ μὴ ἀπλῶς, ἀλλὰ τί (1402 a 3–4). For Aristotle, as it is possible in dialectics to affirm that non-being is, inasmuch as it is non-being, or that the unknowable, τὸ ἄγνωστον, can be known, because we know that it is unknowable, in the same way in rhetoric it is possible to construct an apparent ἐνθύμημα not on the basis of what is universally probable, but on the basis of what is probable only in a particular sense, παρὰ τὸ μὴ ἀπλῶς εἰκὸς ἀλλὰ τί εἰκὸς (1402 a 4–9). Agathon offers us an explicit testimony of this idea in general terms, saying that it is plausible that many improbable things happen to human beings: τάχ' ἂν τις εἰκὸς αὐτὸ τοῦτ' εἶναι λέγει, | βροτοῖσι πολλὰ τυγχάνειν οὐκ εἰκότα (1402 a 11–12 = Agathon fr. 9, *TrGF* 1.164). But for Aristotle, this is true only as a particular case, and it does not have an absolute value (1402 a 9–17).³

This τόπος, that is to say, the failure to distinguish between absolute sense and particular sense, is for Aristotle the basis of the τέχνη of Corax. If a man is arraigned on an unlikely charge, ἂν τε γὰρ μὴ ἔνοχος ἦ τῇ αἰτίᾳ—the example mentioned by Aristotle here is that of a weak person accused of violence—he will defend himself by arguing that it is not likely that he committed the crime. Vice versa, καὶ ἔνοχος ἦ—the example is that of a strong person accused of violence—he will argue that it is not plausible, precisely because his guilt would seem to be plausible to everybody.⁴ For Aristotle, both arguments appear to be probable, but only the former is probable in an absolute sense (1402 a 17–23). “Making the weaker argument stronger” consists precisely in this process of reasoning, τὸ τὸν ἥττω δὲ λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν τοῦτ' ἐστίν. And according to Aristotle, this gave rise to the popular disregard for Protagoras' programme, καὶ ἐντεῦθεν δικαίως ἐδυσχέρανον οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸ Πρωταγόρου ἐπάγγελμα. This programme is based on what is unreal, it does not belong to a τέχνη other than rhetoric or eristic,

³ On enthymemes in Aristotle, see Rapp 2002, 1.323–335. The *topos* considered here by Aristotle is the *fallacia secundum quid*, previously studied as “restricted to time and manner” (1401 b 34–1402 a 3); cp. Grimaldi 1980–1988, 2.349–350. According to Kerferd 1981, 100–101, Aristotle, who in this passage uses material from the fifth century, is bearing in mind here also the *Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος* of Gorgias (DK 82 B 1–5, II.279.19–284.10). Agathon's two verses are also referred to in the *Poetics* (1456 a 23–25): the use of arguments based upon εἰκὸς is frequently attested in tragedy. Hose 2000 provides a wide-ranging overview. But it is possible to go back at least to the *Hymn to Hermes*, 265 (οὐδὲ βοῶν ἐλατῆρι κραταίῳ φωτὶ ἔοικα); see Gagarin 2007, 32–33.

⁴ This is a “reverse probability argument”, according to Gagarin 2002, 29. For the τέχνη of Corax and the *locus de precavente*, a detailed analysis is to be found in Kowalski 1937, 42–56. Cp. Kennedy 1994, 32–35.

ψεῦδος τε γάρ ἐστι, καὶ οὐκ ἀληθὲς ἀλλὰ φαινόμενον εἰκός, καὶ ἐν οὐδεμιᾷ τέχνῃ ἀλλ' ἐν ῥητορικῇ καὶ ἐριστικῇ (1402 a 24–28, DK 80 A 21, II.260.5–8).⁵

Thus Aristotle clearly introduces Protagoras' ἐπάγγελμα in a context of reflection about rhetoric: Protagoras is believed to have developed a technique which, partly thanks to a free use of the εἰκός, allowed him to reason in an apparently effective manner in controversial legal cases, both in one direction and in the other.

According to another testimony, too, from the fourth book of *Γῆς περίοδος* by Eudoxus, quoted by Stephanus of Byzantium (s.v. "Ἀβδηρα = 307 Lasserre, DK 80 A 21, II. 260.9–11), Protagoras made the weaker argument even stronger (Πρωταγόρας, ὃν Εὐδοξος ἱστορεῖ τὸν ἥσσω καὶ κρείσσω λόγον πεποιηκέναι),⁶ and taught his followers to criticize and to praise the same person (καὶ τοὺς μαθητάς δεδιδαχέναι τὸν αὐτὸν ψέγειν καὶ ἐπαινεῖν).

Eudoxus puts the ἐπάγγελμα in the context of Protagoras' didactic activity, and connects it with the possibility of developing two opposite λόγοι about the same subject. This aspect of Protagoras' reflection is well known to the tradition. For Seneca (*Ep.* 88.43, DK 80 A 20, II.260.2–4), Protagoras affirmed the principle that on every subject, it is possible to argue in an equally effective way on either side, *de omni re in utramque partem disputari posse ex aequo*, even with respect to the principle itself, *et de hac ipsa, an omnis res in utramque partem disputabilis sit*. For Clemens Alexandrinus (*Strom.* 6.8.65.1, DK 80 A 20, II.260.1–2) and Diogenes Laertius (9.51, DK 80 B 6a, II.266.13–14), Protagoras was the first person who developed the theory of the existence of two λόγοι in opposition, ἀντικείμενοι, for every question. And it is not by chance that the same Diogenes Laertius attributes the composition of two books of *Antilogies* to Protagoras (9.55, DK 80 A 1, II.253.23–24). Clearly, the possibility of developing two opposite reasonings on the same subject is compatible with the nucleus of Protagoras' speculation, the man-measure principle (DK 80 B 1, II.263.3–5).⁷

⁵ Aristotle's criticism of the ἐπάγγελμα is based more upon logical than upon moral reasons, according to Cope & Sandys 1877, 321–322. Cp. Grimaldi 1980–1988, 2.353–354.

⁶ The recent translations of Migliori, Ramelli & Reale 2006, 1567 and Bonazzi 2009, 82 do not appreciate the intensive value of καί. Cp., however, Lasserre 1966, 112 and 258, who assumes, amongst other things, the presence of an intermediate source, perhaps Alcidas.

⁷ Schiappa 2003, 89–102 offers a wide-ranging overview of the principle of the two λόγοι ἀντικείμενοι. Cp. Radermacher 1951, 39–40. Regarding the structure and contents of Protagoras' *Antilogies*, Untersteiner 1947–1948 is still useful; see, however, Kerferd & Flashar 1998, 30. Robinson 2003 reviews the relationship between Protagoras and the *Dissoi logoi*. On the man-measure principle, see the *status quaestionis* in Huss 1996, 229–257. Cp. also Sicking,

Thus the interpretation of Aristotle and Eudoxus is followed by the tradition, which attributes to Protagoras a technique that is capable of producing opposite λόγοι on a given question, and thus of sustaining, and rendering persuasive, even the objectively weaker, if not clearly false, λόγος. For Cicero, in *Brutus* (8.30–31), sustaining the weaker cause, *causa inferior*, becomes the manifesto of the rhetoric not only of Protagoras, but also of the most famous of the so-called sophists, Gorgias, Thrasyarchus, Prodicus, Hippias. They had as their opponent Socrates, who used to confute their practices *subtilitate quadam disputandi*.⁸

Even in attestations where Protagoras is not expressly mentioned, the ἐπάγγελμα is interpreted in accordance with the indications of Aristotle and Eudoxus. In Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (11.25), making the weaker argument stronger simply means giving an appearance of truth to what is false. In his *Antidosis* ([15.]15–16), Isocrates imagines that his fictitious accuser, Lysimachus, in the hope of prevailing with his lies over the truth, brings him to court with the charge that he is capable of making weaker arguments stronger, τοὺς ἥττους λόγους κρείττους ... ποιεῖν. The charge creates a paradox: if Isocrates speaks in a skilful, convincing manner, he will corroborate the accusation of Lysimachus; if, on the contrary, his speech does not come up to their expectations, the judges will think that his is the weaker cause.⁹

2. ARISTOPHANES

The first, and perhaps the most famous attestation of the ἐπάγγελμα, the one which Aristophanes, without any explicit reference to Protagoras, offers in the *Clouds*, is in line with the interpretation indicated by Aristotle and Eudoxus. In Socrates' school, the φροντιστήριον, instruction is given on payment of a fee,

1998, 168–175, Lee, 2005, 8–29, and Bonazzi 2010, 26–39. Corradi 2007 offers a reading of the man-measure principle in the light of pre-Platonic reflections on poetry. Cp. now also Corradi 2012, 112–130.

⁸ But, according to Quintilian (2.16.3), *nam et Socrati obiciunt comici docere eum quo modo peiorem causam meliorem faciat*, where Quintilian is not referring to Aristophanes only, according to Reinhardt & Winterbottom 2006, 284. On Aristotle's Συναγωγή τεχνῶν as a possible source of Cicero and Quintilian for the history of rhetoric, see Schöpsdau 1994, 193–205.

⁹ Pomeroy 1994, 313–314 detects a criticism of professional rhetoric in *Oec.* 11.25 of Xenophon. Nightingale 1995, 13–59 rightly stresses the relationship between Isocrates' *Antidosis* and Plato's *Apology*. Nicolai 2004, 96–107 explains the educational value of the speech, beyond the legal fiction.

as to how to win just and unjust cases by means of words, λέγοντα νικᾶν καὶ δίκαια καὶ ἀδίκαια (94–99). Socrates and his pupils possess two types of argument: the stronger one and the weaker one, εἶναι παρ' αὐτοῖς φασιν ἄμφω τῷ λόγῳ, τὸν κρείττον', ὅστις ἐστί, καὶ τὸν ἥττονα (112–113, DK 80 C 2, II.270.26–27). The weaker argument makes it possible to prevail, even in contrast with justice. For this reason, Strepsiades, the protagonist of the comedy, who desires to free himself from the debts contracted by his son, Phidippides, insists that his son should learn it (1–120). Introduced onto the stage by Socrates in order to educate Phidippides, the two personified λόγοι challenge each other to a contest on the subject of παιδεία (889–1104, DK 80 C 2, II.270.30). Even if the majority of scholia, together with the *hypotheses*, the *dramatis personae*, and the speaker indications beside the text, attribute the names δίκαιος and ἀδίκος to the two λόγοι, the internal evidence and the scholia in MSS. RVE on 889 and 891 suggest that the names of the two λόγοι were κρείττων and ἥττων.¹⁰ The stronger argument is spokesman for a traditional kind of education. The weaker one, on the contrary, supports a more modern education, indifferent to any reasoning of a moral nature, tending to develop a dialectic ability in young men. The weaker argument succeeds in prevailing over the stronger, thanks to a technique which seems to be based on the ability to overturn the reasonings of the stronger argument, and use them to its own advantage. To give a few examples: the dislike of the stronger argument for hot baths (991) is defeated by the mythological paradigm of Heracles (1043–1052), the criticism of discourses in the ἀγορά (991) by the evocation of the figure of Nestor, the orator par excellence (1055–1059), the example of σωφροσύνη illustrated by the stronger argument in the figure of Peleus (1063 and 1067) is demolished by recalling the misadventures of Peleus with Thetis (1068–1070).¹¹

¹⁰ See, in particular, 893–894 ἀπολείς σύ; τίς ὤν;—λόγος.—ἥττων γ' ὤν. |—ἀλλὰ σε νικῶ τὸν ἐμοῦ κρείττω | φάσκοντ' εἶναι. For the scholia in MSS. RVE on 899 and 891, see Dover 1968, 54. According to Guidorizzi δίκαιος and ἀδίκος are the result of late corrections (possibly of a moralistic character): Guidorizzi & Del Corno 1996, 293–294.

¹¹ As Guidorizzi in Guidorizzi & Del Corno 1996, 298 points out, in order to destroy the system of argumentation of the stronger argument, the weaker argument exploits to its own advantage the exemplary value of mythological tradition. Thermal spa's were called Ἡράκλεια λουτρά. According to a tradition which goes back at least to Pisander of Rhodes (fr. 7, *PEG* 1.168 = *EGF* fr. 9A p. 133), Athena caused the springs of Thermopylae to flow in order to refresh the tired Heracles. For the image of hot baths as a symbol of the corrupt pedagogy of the sophists, see Segoloni 1994, 158–160. The use of Homeric figures in a debate on ethics is typical of the age of the sophists; cp. Giuliano 1995. Mastromarco 1983, 410–411, nn. 137–138 reconstructs the story of Peleus and Thetis mentioned in *Clouds* 1068–1070.

A similar technique of ‘overturning’ has been detected in many of the opposing speeches of Thucydides. We may think of the couple of discourses of the Peloponnesians and Phormio at Naupactos (2.87–89), in which the numerical superiority of the Peloponnesians, seen by them as a point of strength, is interpreted by Phormio as a sign of weakness, the consequence of their previous defeat, or the couple of discourses of Hermocrates and Euphemus at Camarina, in which the question of imperialism used by Hermocrates against the Athenians is brilliantly overturned by Euphemus against Syracuse (6.76–87).¹² But already in the *Tetralogies* by Antiphon, reportedly Thucydides’ teacher, this technique is one of the most frequently exploited argumentative instruments.¹³ In the second discourse of the first *Tetralogy*, we find an application of this technique on the level of what is εἰκός. The defendant answers the prosecutor’s argument that his open enmity towards the victim is a plausible indication of his guilt: it would be even more plausible, εἰκότερον, if, foreseeing that he would be suspected, he had chosen not to expose himself to this risk (*Tetralogy* 1, 2.2.3). There is a clear continuity between the work of Antiphon and Protagoras in the second *Tetralogy*, where Antiphon deals with a subject, on which Pericles reportedly spent a whole day, discussing it with Protagoras (Plut. *Vit. Per.* 36.5, DK 80 A 10, II.257.14–17), penal responsibility for the death of an athlete accidentally struck by a javelin.¹⁴

If we bear in mind the distortions created by the comic perspective, what Aristophanes tells us about the dialectic teaching of the φροντιστήριον may be largely compatible with what Aristotle attributes to Protagoras. Already in the *scholia recentiora* on the *Clouds* (112b), an admittedly late exegetic tradition points out that Aristophanes was here attributing to Socrates a

¹² Cp. the detailed analysis of de Romilly 1956, 180–239. Hornblower 1987, 110–135, however, tends to insist on the originality of Thucydides with respect to contemporary cultural trends. Hunter 1973, 43–60 also interprets Phormio’s discourse in the light of Protagoras’ ἐπάγγελμα; cp., however, Fantasia 2003, 559–560.

¹³ The information that Thucydides was a student of Antiphon is supplied by Marcellinus (*Vit. Thuc.* 22). Tradition might have inferred this from Thucydides’ eulogy of Antiphon (8.68); cp. Andrewes in Gomme, Andrewes & Dover 1981, 172–174. Piccirilli 1985, 97–99, however, favours the historicity of the information. As to the problem of the identification of Antiphon of Rhamnus, the author of the *Tetralogies*, as Antiphon the sophist, Narcy 1989 offers a detailed review. Cp. Desclos 2009, 163–172.

¹⁴ For the comparative εἰκότερον, which is not attested outside Antiphon’s *Tetralogies*, see Decleva Caizzi, 1969, 182. According to Gagarin 2002, 112–118, Antiphon, while illustrating the role that arguments based upon εἰκός have when evidence is lacking, at the same time realizes their limits here. The problem of the relationship between the second *Tetralogy* and Protagoras is considered by Cole 1991, 77–78. Cp. O’Sullivan 1995.

doctrine that in actual fact should have been attributed to Protagoras.¹⁵ Many characteristics of the Socrates of the *Clouds* seem, effectively, to be reminiscent of Protagoras; we may think in particular of the ‘grammar’ lesson given by Socrates to Strepsiades (658–693, DK 80 C 3, II.270.32–271.7), which seems to echo topics of the *ὀρθοέπεια* of Protagoras (DK 80 A 26, II.261.26–262.211; A 27, II.262.12–13; A 28, II 262.14–18). As has been underlined several times by modern critics, the Socrates of the *Clouds* presents aspects which combine the characteristics of various intellectuals who were active in the Athens of the period. Among these, Protagoras undoubtedly played a leading role.¹⁶

The line of interpretation that goes from Aristophanes to Aristotle, then, clearly puts Protagoras’ *ἐπάγγελμα* in a context of reflection on rhetoric, and interprets it as the teaching of a dialectical skill which is capable of prevailing with arguments that are in themselves somewhat implausible, and overturning the argumentations of opponents, transforming elements of strength into elements of weakness.

But can this line of interpretation be accepted without any qualification? As anticipated, the answer of our most important source for Protagoras, Plato, to this question is significant.

3. PLATO

The *ἐπάγγελμα* attributed to Protagoras by Aristotle appears in the *Apology of Socrates*. Here, in distinguishing between ancient and recent accusers, Socrates goes back to the accusations that Aristophanes had formulated against him in the *Clouds*. These ancient accusations are for Socrates re-searching into “things below the earth and in the sky”, *ζητῶν τά τε ὑπὸ γῆς καὶ οὐράνια*, making the weaker argument stronger, *τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν*, and teaching other people about these same matters, *ἄλλους ταῦτα*

¹⁵ See Sch. *In Nub.* 112b (Scholia anonyma recentiora): ψεύδεται ... ἱκωμικός [Ἰ. Ἀριστοφάνης] λέγων παρὰ Σωκράτει εἶναι τὸν ἄδικον λόγον. οὐ γὰρ Σωκράτης, ἀλλὰ Πρωταγόρας ὁ Αὐδηρίτης ἔφεύρεν [ἐπενόησεν] αὐτὸν καὶ ἐδίδασκεν ἑπὶ μισθῷ. (Scholia in Aristophanem 1.3.2, 224 Koster).

¹⁶ Behind the Socrates of the *Clouds*, it is possible to detect the comic mask of the intellectual. A mask which, according to Imperio 1998, 99–114, combines in itself the two leading trends of contemporary culture, i.e., the cosmological reflection of thinkers such as Anaxagoras, and the rhetorical and linguistic teachings of the sophists. The attribution to Socrates of doctrines deriving from Protagoras is thus no surprise; cp. Navia, 1993, 21–57 and Konstan 2011. Schiappa ²2003, 110–113 offers a wide-ranging review of the presence of allusions to Protagoras in the *Clouds*. For Protagoras’ studies on language, see Brancacci 2002 and Corradi 2012, 144–175; also Rademaker, 87 ff. in this volume.

ταῦτα διδάσκων (19 A 8–C 6). Socrates answers the first accusation by calling the citizens of Athens as witnesses: he has never conducted discussions in these fields (19 D 1–7). He answers the third accusation by contrasting himself with Gorgias, Prodicus and Hippias, and narrating a conversation he had with Callias about Euenus (19 D 8–20 C 3). The second accusation remains unanswered. Possibly an indirect answer is to be found in the long story about the oracle at Delphi, and the subsequent examination of the alleged sages of Athens, pages which illustrate the foundation and the nature of the ἐλεγχος (20 C 4–22 E 6).¹⁷ Strangely enough, Socrates does not make any reference to Protagoras, although he does not hesitate to mention Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias and Euenus, and subsequently, in a sharp quarrel with Meletus, also Anaxagoras, to whom should be attributed the meteorological doctrines on account of which Socrates is accused (26 D 6–E 4).¹⁸ Actually, for Socrates, “making the weaker argument stronger” simply is a commonplace, one of the generic accusations that popular contempt reserves for those who devote themselves to philosophy, τὰ κατὰ πάντων τῶν φιλοσοφούντων πρόχειρα ταῦτα λέγουσιν (23 D 2–7).

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato attributes to Tisias a method of reasoning based on the uninhibited use of the εἰκός, that same τέχνη of Corax which, as we have seen, Aristotle associates with Protagoras (273 A 6–C 5).¹⁹ Here Plato does not mention Protagoras: in his review of rhetoric, in a comprehensive survey, he presents Tisias and Gorgias as occupying a similar position with regard to the doctrine of the εἰκός (267 A 6–7), whereas he mentions Protagoras in connection with the research on language of Polus and Licymnius; he does allude, however, to the fact that Protagoras’ interests are broader and of a quite different nature, καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ (267 C 4–7).²⁰

¹⁷ Thus Heitsch ²2004, 71–72; cp. already Sesonske 1968. De Strycker 1994, 51 n. 8, on the contrary, identifies an answer to this accusation in 19 D 8–20 C 3; while Leibowitz 2010, 52 refers to 19 D 5–7. As to the main problems of interpretation of Plato’s *Apology* and, in particular, the controversial problem of its ‘historicity’, see Erler 2007, who reviews an extensive bibliography.

¹⁸ In my opinion, the reference to Anaxagoras invalidates the argument of De Strycker 1994, 54 n. 14, according to whom Protagoras is not mentioned because he was already dead at the time of Socrates’ trial.

¹⁹ DK 80 A 26, II.261.26–262.11. Cp. Heitsch ²1997, 184–185. Cole 1991b believes that Tisias and Corax are the same person.

²⁰ A precise structure marks the particular position of Protagoras in Plato’s review of rhetoric: Protagoras is not mentioned by Socrates but by *Phaedrus*; see Corradi 2006, 50–54. For Plato, Tisias and Gorgias went too far in valuing the εἰκός much higher than truth. This presupposition is, according to Tordesillas 2007, 1007–1008, the philosophical basis of their rhetoric. Gagarin 2002, 29–30, however, tries to show that “the Sophists valued the truth but realized that, if direct access to it is impossible, they needed to resort to probabilities”.

Furthermore, in the *Theaetetus* (162 D 4–163 A 1), Plato attributes to Protagoras a general depreciation of processes of reasoning based on the εἰκός, in contrast to the stringency of demonstrations by scholars of geometry.²¹

Even in the *Protagoras*, the dialogue that is explicitly devoted to the discussion of the studies and teaching of Protagoras, no mention is made of the ἐπάγγελμα which Aristotle attributes to the sophist. Plato attributes to him an ἐπάγγελμα of a very different nature. When being insistently asked by Socrates what the aim of his teaching is, Protagoras declares that he is able to teach an εὐβουλία in private and public affairs.²² Socrates identifies this εὐβουλία as a πολιτική τέχνη. In assenting, Protagoras states that this is his teaching programme, τὸ ἐπάγγελμα δ' ἐπαγγέλλομαι. A teaching that enables his pupils to run the house in an excellent manner, ὅπως ἂν ἄριστα τὴν αὐτοῦ οἰκίαν διοικοῖ, and, as in Phoenix's programme for Achilles in the *Iliad* (μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμεναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων 9.443), to act and speak in the most suitable way in public, ὅπως τὰ τῆς πόλεως δυνατώτατος ἂν εἴη καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν (318 E 5–319 A 7, DK 80 A 5, II.256.24–26).²³ A teaching, moreover, that is capable of giving immediate results: if the young Hippocrates, whom Socrates has accompanied to Protagoras, decides to attend this course, he will return home every day a better person than the day before, ἥ ἂν ἡμέρᾳ ἐμοὶ συγγένῃ, ἀπιέναι οἴκαδε βελτίονι γεγονότι (318 A 6–9, DK 80 A 5, II.256.17–20).

In another famous passage dedicated to the presentation of the doctrines of Protagoras, the apology of the *Theaetetus* (166 A 2–168 C 2, DK 80 A 21a, II.260.12–31), Protagoras points out, in Socrates' words, that the man-measure principle does not exclude the presence of a σοφός who is capable of changing

²¹ But Lee 1973, 226–239 reads an ironic intention of Plato here. Compare now Ferrari 2011, 301 n. 126. For the position of Protagoras in the panorama of reflections on geometry of the period, see Cattanei 2003, 485–486 and Corradi 2012, 177–229. Mansfeld 1981, 49–50 interprets Protagoras' observations about geometrical figures (DK 80 B 7, II.266.17–24) in the light of the principle of τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν.

²² For the concept of εὐβουλία, see Müller 1975, 74–82, and Woodruff, 179 ff. in this volume. As Heinimann 1976 (= 1961), 152–153 points out, the use of “Abstraktkomposita” with the prefix εὐ- by sophists and contemporary thinkers to designate their ‘Lehrziel’ is well attested; besides the εὐβουλία of Protagoras and the εὐδαιμονία of Socrates, we may recall the εὐέπεια of Licymnus and Polus (*Phaedrus* 267 B 10–C 3), and the εὐθυμία of Democritus (e.g., DK 68 B 2c, II.132.11 and B 3, II.132.12–133.5). Cp. Gigon 1972 (= 1946), 121.

²³ As the Pericles of Thucydides (1.139.4) was λέγειν τε καὶ πράσσειν δυνατώτατος; cp. Manuwald, 1999, 153 and Denyer 2008, 95. Aristotle, in using the phrase τὰ δὲ πολιτικά ἐπαγγέλλονται ... διδάσκειν οἱ σοφισταί in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1180 b 35) to express the central position of preparation for political activity in the teaching of the sophists, seems to refer to this passage of the *Protagoras*; cp. Serrano Cantarín & Díaz de Cerio Díez, 2005, 146 n. 84. οἰκίαν διοικεῖν, too, in the *Republic* (600 C 7–D 5) is, for Plato, a part of the teaching of the sophists Protagoras and Prodicus; cp. Ford 2001, 99–100.

opinions and sensations from worse to better. This happens, for example, by means of παιδεία, which is an effective instrument to change the disposition of men for the better, οὕτω δὲ καὶ ἐν τῇ παιδείᾳ ἀπὸ ἐτέρας ἕξεως ἐπὶ τὴν ἀμείνω μεταβλητέον (167 A 3–4). The sophist effects this change of ἕξις by using λόγοι, as the doctor uses drugs. And just as the farmer and the doctor are capable of substituting positive, healthy sensations and dispositions for harmful ones in plants and in patients, the good political rhetor leads the city to consider as correct the useful opinions, and not the harmful ones. Thus it is the city that determines what is right and honourable. On the basis of these considerations, the educational claims of the sophist are justified for Protagoras, and he has the right to charge a fee.²⁴

Are we entitled to think that the theory presented in Protagoras' apology about παιδεία as an effective instrument for the training of better citizens, through the substitution of a better ἕξις for a negative ἕξις is the interpretation that Plato offers us of the ἐπάγγελμα of Protagoras? This hypothesis also is certainly not without difficulties. In the apology of the *Theaetetus*, Plato does not speak about a substitution of λόγοι, but of ἕξεις. The λόγος is rather the means by which this substitution is achieved.²⁵ In any case, on the basis of the *Theaetetus* and the *Protagoras*, the ἐπάγγελμα of Protagoras has the connotation of an educational proposal, which is capable of guaranteeing success for pupils in political life and in private affairs, the fruit of a perfect union of word and action. A teaching, therefore, which, through the strength

²⁴ Kerferd 1981, 100–105, following DK 80 A 21, II.260.5–31 and Untersteiner³1996, 79–85, clearly connects the ἐπάγγελμα of Protagoras with the apology of the *Theaetetus*. This view is also held now by Gavray 2007, who discovers a network of references between the apology of the *Theaetetus*, Plato's *Apology of Socrates* and the *Clouds* of Aristophanes.

²⁵ According to Kerferd 1981, 104–105, however, on the basis of *Tht.* 172 B 8–C 1, the substitution of ἕξεις corresponds, for Protagoras, to a substitution of λόγοι. For Giannantoni 1996, 233–234, the apology of the *Theaetetus* represents the most adequate and plausible interpretation of Protagoras' thought. Gavray 2007, 148–155 detects in the apology the ideal perspective of a "portrait sans doute éloigné du Protagoras historique". The reference to γράφειν in the incipit (γέγραφα 166 D 1), however, leads us to assume a close relationship with Protagoras' work. The theory of παιδεία formulated in the apology seems to take account of the sophistic paradoxes about learning developed by the eristics in the *Euthydemus* (275 C 5–278 E 2). Erler 1987, 217 n. 16 points out, amongst other things, a possible allusion to the Καταβάλλοντες of Protagoras (DK 80 B 1, II.262.30–264.10) in this section of the dialogue (ἔτι δὴ ἐπὶ τὸ τρίτον καταβαλὼν ὥσπερ πάλαισμα ὥρμα ὁ Εὐθύδημος τὸν νεανίσκον 277 D 1–2); cp. Kahn 2000, 91–92. On the level of the myth, Plato offers a new solution to the problem in the *Meno* (80 E 1–81 E 2); cp. Arrighetti 2007. In the apology of the *Theaetetus*, Protagoras uses his παιδεία to influence people with true opinions, and he succeeds in orienting their opinions for the better. Also the great speech of the *Protagoras* restricts the teaching of virtue to those who already possess it to a certain extent by nature; cp. Vegetti 2004.

of the λόγος, brings about a change for the better in pupils, which, from the point of view of utility, reflects on the πόλις. We do not find any trace, therefore, of what Aristotle attributes to Protagoras in his *Rhetoric*.

4. PLATO AND ARISTOTLE COMPARED: A HYPOTHESIS

What kind of hypothesis, then, can we formulate as to this singular difference of opinion between Plato and the rest of the tradition, in particular Aristotle?

In the first place, we clearly must bear in mind the approach to the history of philosophy which is typical of Aristotle—an approach in which the historical interest does not prevail over the systematic point of view.²⁶ In the chapter of the *Rhetoric* in which he refers to the ἐπάγγελμα of Protagoras, Aristotle, following a procedure which is customary for him, unifies different positions, which are not necessarily homogeneous, in order to reject them by means of a single rebuttal: the reflection of Agathon about the εἰκός, the τέχνη of Corax, and the ἐπάγγελμα of Protagoras (2.24, 1402 a 9–28). Furthermore, in the detailed treatment of the man-measure principle that Aristotle offers in his *Metaphysics* too, he freely unites—for purposes of refutation—Protagoras' principle with the ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα of Anaxagoras in book Γ (1007 b 18–26, DK 80 A 19, II.259.28–33) and with the Megarian reflection about potency and actuality in book Θ (1046 b 29–1047 a 8, DK 80 A 17, II.259.8–20).²⁷

In any case, the achievement of εὐβουλία, the ability to take appropriate decisions, which is the ultimate aim of his educational course, could not exclude, for Protagoras, the dialectical exercise of two opposing arguments. The principle of antilogy is already at the basis of the possibility of formulating a correct judgment in Herodotus (7.102.1): the speech of Artabanus to the King of Persia contains the affirmation that it is not possible to take the best decision if contrasting opinions have not previously been analysed, μὴ λεχθεῖσέων μὲν γνωμέων ἀντιέων ἀλλήλησιν οὐκ ἔστι τήν

²⁶ Regarding the philosophical historiography of Aristotle, see, after the seminal studies of Cherniss (1935 and 1944), at least the contributions of Berti 1986 and Mansfeld 1990 (= 1986), 28–45. There is an up-to-date bibliography in Flashar ²2004, 456–457. The presentation of the sophists is studied in particular by Classen 1981.

²⁷ Cherniss 1935, 76–79 explains the connection between Protagoras and Anaxagoras in Aristotle's reasoning. For the interpretation of Protagoras on the basis of pre-Socratic physics as presented in Γ, see Cassin & Narcy 1989, 229–230. On Protagoras in the complex discussion of Θ, see Makin 2006, 66–68.

ἀμείνω αἰρεόμενον ἐλέσθαι. But for the judgment to be appropriate, in order to achieve εὐβουλία, it is necessary for the opposing opinions, and consequently for the arguments that support them, to be developed in the best way possible. In conformity with the method of the two arguments, therefore, Protagoras searched for elements of plausibility also in the objectively weaker argument, and tried to find the strong points in it, to make it κρείττω.²⁸ And perhaps this particular aspect gave credit to the accusations that Aristotle mentions in the *Rhetoric*—the accusations that Aristophanes had already exploited for the construction of the comic version of Socrates in the *Clouds*.

Undoubtedly, as Plato's *Apology of Socrates* and the *Clouds* of Aristophanes show, in the opinion of the πολλοί, the accusations involved the ἔλεγχος of Socrates and the antilogical method of Protagoras in the same degree.²⁹ And perhaps it was for this reason that Plato felt the need for a detailed study of Protagoras' ἐπάγγελμα, a study that went beyond the superficial contempt of the πολλοί.

Even if Plato saw the limits of Protagoras' position, he succeeded in incorporating his method in the complex course of παιδεία that the latter had developed. He probably perceived τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν as an inevitable process, as a result of the method of opposing arguments, in order to achieve εὐβουλία. He was ready to recognize the common commitment to παιδεία which distinguished Socrates and Protagoras:³⁰ it comes as no surprise that at the end of the *Protagoras* we witness the reversal of the positions about the teachability of virtue initially sustained by Socrates and Protagoras. Socrates imagines that the ἐξοδος τῶν λόγων, in personified form, acutely gives

²⁸ Woodruff 1999, 296–298 clearly connects εὐβουλία with Protagoras' dialectical method. For the parallel with Herodotus, see Kulesz 2006, 61–67 and Thomas 2006, 67–68. It is possible that in his research on the stronger λόγος, Protagoras made use of the studies on ὀρθοέπεια. They were not limited to the level of names: this is attested by the analyses of the poem by Simonides developed in the *Protagoras* (339 A 6–D 9; cp. DK 80 A 25, II.261.19–22), for which see Giuliano 2004 (= 1991), in particular 21–26; and those of book 21 of the *Iliad* preserved by POxy 221 (col. XII 19–25, DK 80 A 30, II.262.22–27), for which see Montanari 1999 and Capra 2005. Cp. Bonazzi 2010, 60–65.

²⁹ Kerferd 1981, 62–63 correctly distinguishes antilogic from eristic. But, as Plato's *Sophist* (225 B 9–11) makes clear, antilogic may proceed by means of questions and answers, in the same way as the ἔλεγχος of Socrates; cp. De Luise & Farinetti 2000, 211–213, above all n. 5. Striker 1996, 7–11 analyses the subsequent developments of these distinctions, especially in Aristotle.

³⁰ Schiappa ²2003, 113–114, who interprets the ἐπάγγελμα of Protagoras in the light of the physics of Heraclitus, recognizes its positive influence on certain doctrines of Plato and Aristotle.

expression to this reversal (361 A 3–C 2). Behind this personification of the outcome of the arguments an allusion to the two λόγοι in the *Clouds* may be hidden.³¹

The rhetorical perspective of Aristotle and the more markedly philosophical perspective, that is, the theory of παιδεία that Plato presents in the apology of the *Theaetetus*, probably coexisted without any friction in Protagoras. And thus it would be possible to explain the different readings of the ἐπάγγελμα offered by the subsequent tradition: the development of thought which, starting from the discord between philosophy and rhetoric in the *Gorgias*, arrives at the establishment of rhetoric as an autonomous field of investigation in Aristotle, makes it impossible to recover the peculiar unity of rhetoric, philosophy and παιδεία that characterizes the thought of Protagoras.³²

Undoubtedly, the principle of τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν is, together with that of man-measure and the δύο λόγοι ἀντικείμενοι, one of the most important foundations of Protagoras' thought. On the basis of this principle, Protagoras may have developed a theory of παιδεία as it is illustrated in the apology of the *Theaetetus*; his technique of reasoning and his rhetorical teaching may be based on the same principle:³³ a παιδεία of the λόγος, therefore, which has its foundation in the λόγος and offers in the λόγος its results. But Protagoras was not the only one who exploited a similar connection between philosophy and rhetoric. As Plato points out in the *Phaedrus* (269 E 4–270 A 8), it is from the thought of Anaxagoras that the rhetoric of Pericles derives its force (DK 59 A 15, II.10.9–15). And the great contemporary of Protagoras, Gorgias, places his own reflections on the relationship between man and λόγος in the context of the discourse defending Helen (DK 82 B 11.8–14, II.290.15–293.3).³⁴

³¹ Cp. Nestle in Nestle & Hofman ⁸1978, 168 and Manuwald 1999, 445. On the presence of other possible allusions to τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν in Protagoras, cp. Untersteiner ³1996, 96–97. The expression ἔξοδος τῶν λόγων may refer to a comic model, according to Capra 2001, 90.

³² We should, however, not overlook the frequent exchanges between philosophy and rhetoric in Isocrates or in Aristotle; cp. Tulli 2003, Reinhardt 2007 and Day 2007. Arrighetti 2006, 377–378, n. 1 stresses the progressive specialisation of knowledge.

³³ Untersteiner ³1996, 100–101 sees in the rhetorical aspect of the ἐπάγγελμα only one of the particular fields of application of a more general principle. The motif of Protagoras' παιδεία and the logical aspect of the ἐπάγγελμα coexist in an anecdotal tradition, certainly not favourable to Protagoras, which speaks of a dispute that arose between him and his student Euathlus. This tradition is attested, amongst others, by Diogenes Laertius (9.56) and Aulus Gellius (5.10). Corradi 2012, 31–43 tries to reconstruct its origin.

³⁴ Brisson 1992 stresses the seriousness and importance of the passage in the *Phaedrus*. Heitsch ²1997, 164–168, on the other hand, interprets it in an ironic manner; cp. Giangiulio 2005, 157–161. Kerferd & Flashar 1998, 47 offer an evaluation of the philosophical significance

Therefore, considering the peculiar unity of rhetoric and philosophy that characterizes Protagoras' thought, his ἐπάγγελμα expresses perhaps one of the highest results of the 5th century Greek παιδεία.

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of the exaltation of the λόγος in the *Encomium of Helen*; cp. Paduano ²2007, 61–72 and Wardy 2009, 46–49. Plato certainly takes this into consideration in the *Menexenus* (234 C 1–235 C 5); cp. Tulli 2011.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE MOST CORRECT ACCOUNT: PROTAGORAS ON LANGUAGE*

Adriaan Rademaker

1. INTRODUCTION: PROTAGORAS ON LANGUAGE

The limited number of testimonies concerning Protagoras' views on language credit the sophist with at least rudimentary theories concerning word gender and congruence, concerning the relation between the moods of the verb and the various 'basic types of speech' or speech acts, and possibly also concerning the tenses of the verb (as discussed in section 2). In modern scholarship, it nowadays seems to be widely accepted that these views on language are not to be regarded as part of a systematic and independent body of early linguistic theory; rather, they seem to have been developed within the context of Protagoras' criticism of the poetry of Homer and other poets (section 3). In the present article, it will be argued that Protagoras analysed Greek poems in order to see whether they met the criterion of *ὀρθοέπεια*, a notion of 'correctness of utterance' that encompasses both the use of single words and expressions (elsewhere termed *ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων*) and the consistency of content of whole poems and other pieces of discourse (section 4).

At first sight, this concern for *ὀρθοέπεια* may seem to be something of a separate strand in Protagoras' teaching, quite unrelated to the sophist's alleged main goal of teaching *εὐβουλία*, the skills that prominent Greek

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citizens in the *polis* need to meet the demands of the courts and councils. However, a case can be made (section 5) that these critical analyses of poetic texts are not merely sophisticated examples of linguistic hair-splitting, but that they provide serious training material for aspiring politicians and speakers in court. In public life, the ability to detect inconsistencies in the seemingly self-evident views of an opponent must have been an important asset, just as the ability to reframe seemingly obvious facts by means of a 'correct reasoning' that allows one to infer the most desirable consequences from them. In a world where man is the measure of everything, no political or juridical *logos* can be said to be objectively true; the only way to argue for the justice of one's position is to show that a consistent account can be given in its defence, and to point out flaws in the position of one's opponent. In such a culture of competing *logoi*, Protagoras' criticism of the poets, his ability to detect flaws even in the very first verses of the *Iliad*, the most respected poem of all, is not merely a means to show off his cleverness. It also a means of training his students in the modes of thought and schemes of reasoning that enable them to detect flaws in the discourse of their opponents. In keeping with Protagoras' own claims (Plato *Prot.* 318 D 7–319 A 2), his students do not study poetry for purely literary or linguistic ends; rather, they use it to train their linguistic competence with an eye to their later career in the public life of the Greek *polis*.

2. PROTAGORAS' VIEWS ON LANGUAGE: THE ANCIENT TESTIMONIES

On the evidence of the ancient testimonies, Protagoras' theories of language addressed at least two main issues. In the first place, there is a number of fragments on the topic of *word gender* and congruence between nouns and verbal forms. Secondly, there is a group of testimonies concerning Protagoras' remarks on the *moods* of the verb, and the relation of these to the basic types of speech. Finally, a remark in Diogenes Laertius 9.52 is sometimes taken to mean that Protagoras also distinguished the *tenses* of the verb.

Let us first consider the testimony concerning word gender. In his *Rhetoric* Aristotle gives five rules for the proper use of the Greek language (1407 a 19–20 ἔστι δ' ἀρχὴ τῆς λέξεως τὸ ἐλληνίζειν· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ἐν πέντε, 'the basis of style is the proper use of the Greek language, and that depends on five rules'). These five rules are (1) the proper use of connecting particles; (2) the use of specific rather than general terms; (3) the avoidance of ambiguities, and the proper use of (4) word gender and (5) number.

[1]

τέταρτον, ὥς Πρωταγόρας τὰ γένη τῶν ὀνομάτων διήρει, ἄρρενα καὶ θήλεα καὶ σκεύη· δεῖ γὰρ ἀποδιδόναι καὶ ταῦτα ὁρθῶς· “ἡ δ’ ἐλθοῦσα καὶ διαλεχθεῖσα ὤχετο”.

A fourth (rule is to observe) Protagoras’ distinction between the different genders of words, designating males, females and things; for one must correctly reproduce these distinctions too: “she came, spoke and went away”.

Arist. *Rhet.* 1407 b 6–9; DK 80 A 27, II.262.12–13

As Aristotle’s example makes clear, he insists on the correct rendering of the congruence between nouns/pronouns and the corresponding participles. But the terminology he uses here, using σκεύη ‘thing words’ rather than the more neutral grammatical term τὸ/τὰ μετὰξυ (‘what is in between’—sc. masculine and feminine), suggests that Protagoras may not have been thinking of a purely grammatical distinction between words belonging to different genders, but rather of a semantic distinction between words referring to males, females and things that reflects the real life properties of their referents.¹ He seems to have claimed that there should be a correspondence between the grammatical gender of a word and the biological gender of its referent.² Aristotle on the other hand admitted the possibility of a clash between the grammatical gender of a word and the biological gender of its referent, e.g. in the case of masculine or feminine words referring to things (as in the examples from *Soph. El.* 174 a 4: ἄσκος and κλίνη), but this may well reflect a later stage of linguistic thought.

¹ Aristotle seems to be thinking of a similar semantic distinction between words referring to ‘males’, ‘females’, and ‘things’ in *Soph. El.* 173 b 39–174 a 4: καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν θήλεων ὀνομάτων ὡσαύτως, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν λεγομένων μὲν σκευῶν, ἐχόντων δὲ θηλείας ἢ ἄρρενος κλήσιν. ὅσα γὰρ εἰς τὸ ο καὶ τὸ ν τελευτᾷ, ταῦτα μόνον σκεύους ἔχει κλήσιν, οἷον ξύλον, σχοῖνον· τὰ δὲ μὴ οὕτως ἄρρενος ἢ θήλεος, ὧν ἕνα φέρομεν ἐπὶ τὰ σκεύη, οἷον ἄσκος μὲν ἄρρεν τοῦνομα, κλίνη δὲ θήλυ. “And in the case of words referring to females one must do likewise [i.e. use different forms for the nominative and the accusative], and the same goes for words that are called ‘thing words’ but have a feminine or masculine nominative. For words ending in -ον only have the nominative of a thing, like ξύλον, σχοῖνον. But words with other endings have a masculine or feminine nominative, and some of these we use to refer to things: thus, ἄσκος is a masculine noun, and κλίνη a feminine.” Elsewhere, he uses τὸ μετὰξυ for the neuter gender, as in *Soph. El.* 173 b 26–31 εἰσι δὲ πάντες σχεδὸν οἱ φαινόμενοι σολοικισμοὶ παρὰ τόδε, [καὶ] ὅταν ἡ πτώσις μήτε ἄρρεν μήτε θήλυ δηλοῖ ἀλλὰ τὸ μετὰξυ. τὸ μὲν γὰρ ‘οὔτος’ ἄρρεν σημαίνει, τὸ δ’ ‘αὕτη’ θήλυ. τὸ δὲ ‘τούτο’ θέλει μὲν τὸ μετὰξυ σημαίνει, πολλάκις δὲ σημαίνει ἀκατείνων ἑκάτερον, οἷον ‘τί τοῦτο;’ ‘Καλλιόπη, ξύλον, Κορίσκος’. “Nearly all apparent solecisms concern word gender, when the case form does not indicate a male or female but something neuter. For οὔτος signifies a male and αὕτη a female, and τοῦτο normally indicates the neuter, but often also indicates either of the former, as in ‘what is that?’ ‘Calliope, wood, Coryscus.’” For the use of τὸ/τὰ μετὰξυ, see also *Soph. El.* 166 b 12, *Poet.* 1458 a 17.

² Cp. Sluiter 1990, 8.

In the *Sophistici Elenchi*, Aristotle gives a hint of what form Protagoras' insistence on the correspondence between word gender and biological gender may have taken:

[2]

Σολοικισμός δ' οἷον μὲν ἐστὶν εἴρηται πρότερον· ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο καὶ ποιεῖν καὶ μὴ ποιοῦντα φαίνεσθαι καὶ ποιοῦντα μὴ δοκεῖν, καθάπερ ὁ Πρωταγόρας ἔλεγεν, εἰ 'ὁ μῆνις' καὶ 'ὁ πῆληξ' ἄρρενά ἐστιν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ λέγων 'οὐλομένην' σολοικίζει μὲν κατ' ἐκείνον, οὐ φαίνεται δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις, ὁ δὲ 'οὐλόμενον' φαίνεται μὲν, ἀλλ' οὐ σολοικίζει.

We have said before [165 b 20–21] what a solecism is like. It is possible either to commit one, or to seem to commit one without doing so, or to commit one without seeming to do so, like Protagoras said, if *mênis* and *pêlêx* are masculine things: according to him, a man who calls *mênis* 'deconstructress' commits a solecism, though he does not seem to do so to other people, whereas he who calls *mênis* 'destructor' seems to commit a solecism but does not do so.

Arist. *Soph. El.* 173 b 17–22; DK 80 A 28, II.262.14–17

In this passage Protagoras is reported to have made the claim that if *mênis* is masculine, it would be right to call *mênis oulomenos*, even though people would suppose that to be a grammatical error, and wrong to call *mênis oulomenê*, even though the mistake would go unnoticed. This passage has usually been taken to mean that Protagoras claimed that the nouns *μῆνις* and *πῆληξ* should in fact be masculine, on account of either the martial connotations of the words 'anger' and 'helmet' or their word endings.³ Thus, Protagoras signalled a discrepancy between word gender and biological gender that might be corrected either by saying ὁ μῆνις or by giving the word an ending that is more unequivocally masculine; in doing so, he pointed to a putative mistake in the very first word of the *Iliad*.⁴

³ Gomperz ⁴1922, 368 suggests that Protagoras made his claim for *πῆληξ* on the analogy of words like *θώραξ*, *πόρπαξ* and *στύραξ*. Fehling 1965, 215, and 1976, 344 suggests that Protagoras made his claim on the ground that both *μῆνις* and *πῆληξ* end in -s. According to Kerferd 1981, 68–69, Protagoras may well have taken into account both semantic and morphological criteria. At *Poet.* 1458 a 9–10 Aristotle seems to suggest that words ending in σ or ψ, are typically masculine: ἄρρενα μὲν ὅσα τελευτᾷ εἰς τὸ Ν καὶ Ρ καὶ Σ καὶ ὅσα ἐκ τούτου σύγκειται (ταῦτα δ' ἐστὶν δύο, Ψ καὶ Ξ), "masculine words are those that end in -ν and -ρ and -ς and its composites (there are two of those, ψ and ξ)". Note, however, that -ς is a plausible addition of the *recentiores*. In 1458 a 16–17, Aristotle adds that 'neuter words ends with these (-ι and -υ) and -ν or -ς' (τὰ δὲ μετὰ τὸ εἰς ταῦτα καὶ Ν καὶ Σ).

⁴ An ingenious but arguably unnecessary 'solution' for the 'riddle' of *μῆνις* and *πῆληξ* has been suggested by Lougovaya & Ast 2004, 274–277, who point out that *Mênis* (*Μῆνις*) is well attested as a personal name (e.g., *Μῆνις ὁ δικτύβολος*, *Anth. Pal.* 6.105.2), and that *Πῆληξ* can mean a 'citizen from the Attic deme Peleces' (*Πήληκες*; cp. Aeschines 3.139 'Ἀρχέδημος ὁ Πήληξ'). In that case, the phrase 'if *mênis* and *pêlêx* are masculine' does not claim that the words

There is a parody of these views in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, 658–693,⁵ where Socrates tries to teach Strepsiades on the subject of word gender. In Aristophanes, Protagoras' habit of pointing out mistakes in epic diction is comically distorted into a full-scale programme of language reform.⁶ Socrates asks Strepsiades to name some masculine animals, and then rebukes his pupil for not distinguishing the words for the cock and the hen: he should call the former ἀλεκτρυών, 'he-cock', the latter ἀλεκτρύαινα, 'she-cock'; thus establishing a clear relation between the form and gender of the noun and the sex of the animal to which it refers (661–667). Strepsiades enthusiastically promises to fill Socrates' κάρδοπος with barley; he then makes the apparent 'mistake' of giving a feminine noun the ostensibly masculine ending in -ος (668–672). This leads to the punch line of the joke: just as the κάρδοπος should in fact be called καρδόπη, Cleonymus, one of the archetypal effeminate men of Aristophanic comedy, should in fact be called Cleonyme (680); by contrast, the name Amyntias, being of the first declension, does indeed show—in the vocative at least—that Amyntias shied away from military service and does not qualify as a 'real man' (686–692). The joke behind this scene is that in all cases the gender of nouns should reflect the real life biological gender of their referents. The Aristophanic Socrates exaggerates Protagoras' criticism of Homer by proposing a correction of nouns and proper names that removes all ambiguities in this respect.⁷

Thus, Protagoras seems to have noticed that there is not always a clear-cut relation between the gender of nouns and the biological gender of their referents. Some nouns seem masculine, but in fact refer to females, and vice versa. From the example given in Aristotle's testimony, it appears that Protagoras must have spotted this discrepancy in the context of his investigation of epic diction. As a sophist in search of 'correctness' of

should be masculine on account of their martial semantics, but rather points to something that in some uses of the words is indeed the case. If you call Mēnis *oulomenos*, the whole world will suppose that you made a mistake while in fact you did not; if you call him *oulomenē*, you make a grammatical mistake that escapes notice.

⁵ Ar. *Nub.* 658–679 = Protagoras T 8 Radermacher (1951, 37); DK 80 C 3, II.270.32–271.7.

⁶ On an all too literal reading of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, some critics have unnecessarily supposed that Protagoras envisaged some kind of full-scale language reform, notably Di Cesare²1996.

⁷ The figure of Socrates in *Clouds* may be regarded as a caricature of "the genus 'intellectual' as a whole, (...) with the addition of one or two elements which go a stage beyond caricature and one or two more which relate to the individual Socrates rather than to the genus", Dover 1968, xxxv–vi. For connections between 'Socrates' and the linguistic interests of Protagoras and Prodicus, see Sommerstein 1981, 196 ad *Nub.* 659.

poetic diction (ὀρθοέπεια), Protagoras must have impressed his audiences by pointing to a serious ‘mistake’ in the very first word of the *Iliad*.

In a second group of testimonies, another apparent discrepancy between the form and the use of linguistic features is signalled: the moods of the verb, formally clearly distinct, show considerable overlap in their actual usage. Diogenes Laertius reports that Protagoras distinguished four different ‘basic types of speech’:

[3]

διείλε τε τὸν λόγον πρῶτος εἰς τέτταρα· εὐχωλήν, ἐρώτησιν, ἀπόκρισιν, ἐντολήν (οἱ δὲ εἰς ἑπτὰ· διήγησιν, ἐρώτησιν, ἀπόκρισιν, ἐντολήν, εἰσαγγελίαν, εὐχωλήν, κλήσιν), οὓς καὶ πυθμένας εἶπε λόγων. Ἀλκιδάμας [T 9 Radermacher] δὲ τέτταρας λόγους φησί· φάσιν, ἀπόφασιν, ἐρώτησιν, προσαγόρευσιν.

And he was the first to distinguish four types of discourse: prayer, question, answer, command (others distinguished seven types:⁸ narration, question, answer, command, report, wish, appellation), which he even gave the name of ‘basic forms of speech’. Alcidas says that (there are) four types of discourse: affirmation, negation, question, address. DL 9.53–54; DK 80 A 1, II.254.13–17

The four basic types of ‘speech acts’ that Protagoras distinguished (prayer,⁹ question, answer, command) seem to correspond to typical uses of the four moods of the verb: the optative in requests and prayers, the deliberative subjunctive in questions, the indicative in answers and the imperative in commands.¹⁰ Diogenes Laertius’ report is confirmed by the testimony of Aristotle:

⁸ This is how Suda Π 2958 s.v. Πρωταγόρας explains the text of DL: διείλε τε πάντα λόγον πρῶτος οὗτος εἰς τέσσαρα· εὐχωλήν, ἐρώτησιν, ἀπόκρισιν, ἐντολήν· μετὰ δὲ τοῦτον ἕτεροι εἰς ζ’ διείλον ταῦτα· διήγησιν, ἐρώτησιν, ἀπόκρισιν, ἐντολήν, εἰσαγγελίαν, εὐχωλήν, κλήσιν. Ἀλκιδάμας δὲ τέσσαρας εἶναι φησὶν ἰδέας λόγων· φάσιν, ἀπόφασιν, ἐρώτησιν, προσαγόρευσιν. “He was the first to distinguish four types of discourse: wish, question, answer, command. After him others distinguished seven types: narration, question, answer, command, report, wish, appellation. Alcidas says that there are four types of discourse: affirmation, negation, question, address.” In view of the word-order in DL, in which the seven-fold division is followed by οὓς καὶ πυθμένας εἶπε λόγων, one might consider to read the phrase as an idiomatic brachylogy for “others (say that Protagoras) distinguished seven types”, cp. Fehling 1965, 212; 1976, 341: “Diog. L. 9. 53 sq., wo noch eine andere Version folgt”.

⁹ Or, rather less plausibly, ‘boast’, ‘exclamation’: see Porzig ⁶1975, 378 n. 43 and cp. LSJ s.v. εὐχωλή II.

¹⁰ On the πυθμένες λόγου and their correspondence with various types of speech acts, see Schenkeveld 1984, 293, 326–328; Sluiter 1990, 8 n. 20.

[4]

τί γάρ ἂν τις ὑπολάβοι ἡμαρτησθαι ἃ Πρωταγόρας ἐπιτιμᾷ, ὅτι εὐχέσθαι οἰόμενος ἐπιτάττει εἰπὼν “μῆνιν ἄειδε θεά”; τὸ γὰρ κελεύσαι, φησὶν, ποιεῖν τι ἢ μὴ ἐπιτάξις ἐστίν.

What fault can one find with the words which Protagoras criticizes, when Homer, while thinking that he is uttering a prayer, in fact gives a command in the words “Goddess, sing of the wrath”? For to command, Protagoras says, is to give the instruction to do or not to do something.

Arist. *Poet.* 1456 b 15–18 (cp. DK 80 A 29, II.262.19–21)

Aristotle’s testimony implies that Protagoras must have realized that the imperative is typically used for commands; when this typical use is then taken to be the norm, the use of the imperative in prayers and other types of requests, quite unexceptional in itself, may start to seem problematic. Hence Protagoras criticizes Homer for using an imperative in a request, where the optative would be the typical mood. Of course, the mismatch between form and content of μῆνιν ἄειδε is only apparent; the ‘problem’ with the line arises only when early linguistic thought starts to identify typical uses of the moods of the verb, and mistakes these typical uses for the only acceptable uses. Protagoras does not point to a real mistake on Homer’s side (as Aristotle rightly observes). But again, it must have seemed a remarkable ‘success’ for Protagoras the critic of literature to point to *two* putative linguistic errors in the very first words of the *Iliad*.

A final testimony concerning Protagoras’ views on language is more problematic; I will deal with it only briefly here. Diogenes Laertius remarks that Protagoras “determined the parts of time” (μέρη χρόνου διώρισε):

[5]

καὶ πρῶτος μέρη χρόνου διώρισε καὶ καιροῦ δύναμιν ἐξέθετο καὶ λόγων ἀγῶνας ἐποιήσατο καὶ σοφίσματα¹¹ τοῖς πραγματολογοῦσι προσήγαγε· καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν ἀφείς πρὸς τοῦνομα διελέχθη καὶ τὸ νῦν ἐπιτόλαιον γένος τῶν ἐριστικῶν ἐγέννησεν.

He was the first to determine units of time, to expound the importance of the right moment, to engage in debating contests, and to provide litigants with skilful tricks. He ignored the intention and debated on the level of the formulation, and he begot the now ubiquitous type of eristic debaters.

DL 9.52; DK 80 A 1, II.254.1–4

¹¹ I follow Thomas Aldobran’s emendation of MSS σοφίσματα.

This has long been taken to mean that Protagoras made a formal distinction between the tenses of the verb.¹² However, this interpretation has come in for criticism by, among others, Pfeiffer, who points out that this requires the plural *μέρη χρόνων* rather than *μέρη χρόνου*.¹³ Dunn links the remark not to any kind of formal grammatical theory, but to a general 'epistemological' distinction between past, present and future, and hypothesizes that Protagoras may have argued that people have direct experience of the present, limited memory of the past, and no access whatever to the future.¹⁴ This reading does not quite convince either; in view of the context in DL 9.52, the *μέρη χρόνου* are likely to have some connection with the art of rhetoric. So it may well be more likely that Protagoras is said to have made some division of the parts of speech in connection with the proportioning of the allotted time.¹⁵ However that may be, it seems unsafe to connect the remark with a linguistic theory concerning the tenses of the verb.

So, on balance, four out of five testimonies concerning Protagoras' views on language and grammar suggest that he made some serious observations on the subject of grammar and the use of language. The form in which these observations are transmitted makes it clear that they were made in the context of Protagoras' criticism of Homer's poetic diction, not as part of an independent treatise of language and grammar. This raises the question how Protagoras' criticism of Homer and these linguistic observations fit in with what we know about his activities as a 'sophist' and as a teacher of rhetoric, with his ethical and political views as far as we are able to reconstruct them, and with his thesis that Man is the Measure of everything. The present article will argue that the study of poetic diction is not a separate subject in Protagoras' curriculum; rather, the study of 'correctness' in poetic utterance seems to provide a training ground for the analysis of 'inconsistencies' in political and juridical discourse. The student who learned to detect weaknesses in the Homeric poems, is likely to be well equipped to detect the flaws in the juridical or political discourse of his opponents.

¹² See, e.g., Nestle ⁴1956, 70; Untersteiner ²1961, 1.19; Dumont 1969, 25.

¹³ Pfeiffer 1968, 38–39, 77, 245; followed by Dietz 1976, 154.

¹⁴ Dunn 2001, 547–550.

¹⁵ Thus, Friedel 1873, 1.15–16 n. 16 suggests that the term refers to the proper moment in oratory.

3. PROTAGORAS' VIEWS ON LANGUAGE: MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

On account of the testimonies quoted above, many scholars of the last century have been inclined to regard Protagoras as an early theorist of grammar and linguistics. Steinthal¹⁶ calls his distinction between the word genders 'the discovery of the first grammatical fact', though he duly signals that Aristophanes ridicules Protagoras for his discovery. Porzig¹⁷ describes him as the 'first scholarly student of language', and Di Cesare¹⁸ likewise describes him as the founder of grammatical research.¹⁹ Others, like Robins, add the proviso that even if Protagoras' views on language helped to trigger the study of language for its own sake, Protagoras himself made his observations on language mostly within the framework of his views on rhetoric, implying that the sophist did make remarks on language as an instrument of persuasion, but was not interested in language for its own sake.²⁰

Views of this type have been convincingly challenged by Fehling, who argued that Protagoras' linguistic observations are unlikely to belong to any kind of systematic treatise on language. In view of the fact that in both testimonies, Protagoras illustrates his linguistic observations by citing examples taken from the very first verse of the *Iliad*, they are more likely to have been made in the context of his criticism of poetry.²¹ Protagoras

¹⁶ Steinthal 1890, 1.136: "Auch Protagoras beschäftigte sich mit der Sprache, sicherlich zu rhetorischen Zwecken (...), aber in einer Weise, die hart an die eigentliche Grammatik stößt und zu ihr führen musste. (...) Indessen bleibt immer der Schritt aus der Rhetorik zur Grammatik erst noch zu tun, und Protagoras hat ihn in einem (...) Falle getan, nämlich bei der Unterscheidung der Geschlechter des Nomens (...). Diese Entdeckung der ersten grammatischen Tatsache ist aber auch sogleich mit dem Fluche der Lächerlichkeit beladen." (Followed by a reference to Aristophanes' *Clouds* 659.)

¹⁷ Porzig 1975, 55: "Übrigens sind diese vier Leistungen der Sprache [i.e., Aufforderung, Frage, Mitteilung und Ausruf] schon sehr früh erkannt worden. Gleich der älteste Sprachtheoretiker, Protagoras, hat sie bestimmt und sie 'Stützpfiler der Rede' genannt."

¹⁸ Di Cesare 1991, 104: "Die kritische Bewertung des Werkzeugs Sprache führt also dazu, die grammatische Forschung in Gang zu setzen (...). Protagoras (...) ist als Begründer dieser Forschung zu betrachten."

¹⁹ Cp. also Gentinetta 1961, 26; Dietz 1976, 153–154.

²⁰ Robins 1990, 30: "Protagoras also set out the different types of sentence in which a general semantic function was associated with a certain grammatical structure, e.g. wish, question, statement, and command. This lay within the field of rhetoric, but it provided the material for more formal syntactic analysis of sentence structures by later generations."

²¹ Fehling 1965, 214; 1976, 343: "(...) daß die grammatischen Einteilungen, die von Protagoras überliefert sind, nicht einer systematischen Abhandlung entstammen, sondern nur im Rahmen einer beispielhaften Vorführung seiner Methode der Dichterkritik und auch dort nur beiläufig entwickelt wurden."

supposedly criticized aspects of Homeric diction, and developed some sort of linguistic apparatus as a basis for this criticism on the *Iliad*, rather than using examples from the *Iliad* to illustrate his grammatical theories.²²

The idea that Protagoras' linguistic observations have to be read in the context of his criticism of Homeric poetry now seems to have gained wide acceptance.²³ Protagoras seems to have been fond of a kind of epideictic 'attacks' on the great poets, as his critical discussion of Simonides' poem in Plato's *Protagoras* (339 A 3–347 A 5) demonstrates.²⁴ But the question arises whether this focus on the exegesis of poetry accords at all well with what else we know about Protagoras' curriculum. In Plato's *Protagoras*, Plato makes Protagoras claim that his students have to learn *only* the εὐβουλία (*Prot.* 318 E 5) that enables them to pursue a career in the public life of the *polis*; he claims that he does not bother them with subjects that are irrelevant to this goal. But should we take this to imply that Protagoras did in fact consider the study and criticism of the poets as relevant to the pursuit of εὐβουλία? In what follows, it will be argued that he probably did. We will first try to place Protagoras' linguistic observations on Homer in the context of his interest in ὀρθοέπεια; then, we will try to see if and how Protagoras' concept of ὀρθοέπεια can be linked to his role as a teacher of political ἀρετή and to his thesis that man is "the measure of everything".

4. ORTHOEPEIA: PROTAGORAS AND THE STUDY OF CORRECTNESS IN POETIC UTTERANCES

Central to a reconstruction of Protagoras' study of poetical texts is the preface to his discussion of Simonides' poem in Plato's *Protagoras*. Here, Protagoras offers a kind of programmatic statement, stressing the crucial role of literary analysis and criticism for his education:

²² Fehling 1965, 213; 1976, 342: "Wenn die Iliasbelege die eigentlichen Stützen des Beweisganges gewesen sind, so haben die Einteilungen nur die Funktion gehabt, die Anstöße, die Protagoras nahm, zu erläutern. Das kehrt zwar den ersten Anschein aus den Fragmenten um, nach denen man in den Einteilungen die Hauptsache, in den Beispielen nur Belege, vielleicht einzelne unter vielen, sieht, und das dürfte der psychologische Grund sein, weshalb anscheinend bisher noch niemand auf den Gedanken verfallen ist, die hier ausgesprochene Vermutung zu erwägen."

²³ See, e.g., Schenkeveld 1984, 293; Sluiter 1990, 7–8; 1998, 24–25; de Jonge 2005, esp. 10–12 and 15–16.

²⁴ Segal 1970 suggests that the so-called battle of the prologues in *Ar. Ran.* 1119–1197 gives an idea of what such an epideictic criticism of poetry may look like.

[6]

Ἦγοῦμαι, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἐγὼ ἀνδρὶ παιδείας μέγιστον μέρος εἶναι περὶ ἐπῶν δεινὸν εἶναι· ἔστιν δὲ τοῦτο τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν λεγόμενα οἷόν τ' εἶναι συνιέναι ἅ τε ὁρθῶς πεποιήται καὶ ἅ μὴ, καὶ ἐπίστασθαι διελεῖν τε καὶ ἐρωτώμενον λόγον δοῦναι.

"I consider, Socrates," (he said) "that the most important element of a man's education is that he must be skilled in dealing with poetry. That means that concerning the things the poets say, he must be able to understand what is composed correctly and what is not, to know how to analyse them, and when asked account for his analysis."

Plato, *Protagoras* 338 E 6–339 A 3; DK 80 A 25, II.261.19–22

In one respect, Protagoras' study of poetical texts seems a natural extension of traditional Greek education, which was intensely concerned with the moral value of poetic texts.²⁵ In *Protagoras* 325 C 6–7 the sophist states that education begins "as soon as a child is able to understand what people say" (ἐπειδὴν θάττον συνιῇ τις τὰ λεγόμενα); nurses, pedagogues and parents then confront the child with countless instructions concerning right and wrong. Later, at school, children are confronted with Homer and other poets, in the hope that they will admire and imitate the heroes of epic poetry.²⁶ In the second phase of their formal education, the κιθαριστής teaches them lyric poetry and its music in order that they may develop a well-balanced personality (εὐρυθμία and εὐαρμοστία).²⁷ Finally, the laws of the city

²⁵ Cp. Brancacci 2002, 173–175.

²⁶ Plato *Prot.* 325 E 2–326 A 4: (...) καὶ ἐπειδὴν αὖ γράμματα μάθωσιν καὶ μέλλωσιν συνήσειν τὰ γεγραμμένα ὥσπερ τότε τὴν φωνήν, παρατιθέασιν αὐτοῖς ἐπὶ τῶν βῆθρων ἀναγιγνώσκειν ποιητῶν ἀγαθῶν ποιήματα καὶ ἐκμανθάνειν ἀναγκάζουσιν, ἐν οἷς πολλοὶ μὲν νοθευθεῖσιν ἐνεῖσιν πολλοὶ δὲ διέξοδοι καὶ ἔπαινοι καὶ ἐγκώμια παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν, ἵνα ὁ παῖς ζηλῶν μιμῆται καὶ ὀρέγεται τοιοῦτος γενέσθαι. "And when the children learn their letters and are getting to understand the written word as before they understood only the spoken word, they are furnished with works of good poets to read as they sit in class, and are made to learn them off by heart: here they meet with many admonitions, many descriptions and praises and eulogies of good men in times past, that the boy in envy may imitate them and yearn to become even as they." (transl. Lamb, slightly adapted).

²⁷ Plato *Prot.* 326 A 6–B 6: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις, ἐπειδὴν κιθαρίζειν μάθωσιν, ἄλλων αὖ ποιητῶν ἀγαθῶν ποιήματα διδάσκουσι μελοποιῶν, εἰς τὰ κιθαρίσματα ἐντείνοντες, καὶ τοὺς ῥυθμούς τε καὶ τὰς ἀρμονίας ἀναγκάζουσιν οἰκείουσθαι ταῖς ψυχαῖς τῶν παίδων, ἵνα ἡμερώτεροι τε ᾦσιν, καὶ εὐρυθμότεροι καὶ εὐαρμοσσότεροι γιγνόμενοι χρήσιμοι ᾦσιν εἰς τὸ λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν· πᾶς γὰρ ὁ βίος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εὐρυθμίας τε καὶ εὐαρμοστίας δεῖται. "Moreover, when they learn to play the lyre, their teachers teach them poems by other good poets, the lyrical poets, setting these poems to accompaniments by the lyre, and they force the rhythms and scales to adapt to the boys' characters, in order that they may become calmer, and when they become more orderly in their movements and more balanced, they may become good at speaking and acting; for the whole of man's life stands in need of graceful rhythm and harmony." (my own translation).

continue to instruct adult citizens by literally ‘prescribing’ certain patterns of behaviour.²⁸ In short: more or less the whole of Greek education aims at preparing Greek citizens for their role in the public life of their *polis*; and language is the medium *par excellence* through which this education takes place. Political ἀρετή is embodied in the admonitions of one’s parents, in the poetry of Homer and other good poets, and in the texts of those laws that were set up by good lawgivers for the *polis*. If a man is to acquire social and political skills, he needs a thorough understanding of these kinds of authoritative verbal utterances.

But Protagoras’ educational programme takes the traditional interest in poetry one very significant step further: in traditional education, poetry is supposed to do its pedagogical job more or less by itself. By learning epic poetry by heart, the student is encouraged to imitate the moral examples contained in the poetry; the music of lyrical poetry may help to memorise the texts, but besides, it also seems to have an effect on the student’s mind in that it encourages εὐρυθμία and εὐαρμονία. Protagoras, on the other hand, does not take anything said by the poets for granted. Following in the tradition of Greek thinkers criticising their predecessors—one may think of Xenophanes’ criticism of Homer’s and Hesiod’s anthropomorphic gods (DK 21 B 11) or Heraclitus’ disparagement of Hesiod’s πολυμαθὴν (DK 22 B 40)—Protagoras subjects poetic texts to drastic intellectual scrutiny. Protagoras aims at the understanding (συνιέναι), analysis (διελεῖν), and explanation (λόγον δοῦναι) of poetical texts, using this literary analysis primarily in order to test the consistency of poetical texts: students must be able to understand whether the views expressed by the poets are expressed correctly or not (339 A 2 συνιέναι ἃ τε ὁρθῶς πεποιήται καὶ ἃ μὴ). Accordingly, Simonides’ poem is analysed to see if the ethical ideas expressed in it are consistent, and the poem

²⁸ Plato *Prot.* 326 C 6–D 8: ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἐκ διδασκάλων ἀπαλλαγώσιν, ἡ πόλις αὐτοὺς τε νόμους ἀναγκάζει μανθάνειν καὶ κατὰ τούτους ζῆν κατὰ παράδειγμα, ἵνα μὴ αὐτοὶ ἐφ’ αὐτῶν εἰκὴ πράττωσιν, ἀλλ’ ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ οἱ γραμματισταὶ τοῖς μήπω δεινοῖς γράφειν τῶν παίδων ὑπογράφαντες γραμμὰς τῇ γραφίδι οὕτω τὸ γραμματεῖον διδάσασιν καὶ ἀναγκάζουσι γράφειν κατὰ τὴν ὑφήγησιν τῶν γραμμῶν, ὥς δὲ καὶ ἡ πόλις νόμους ὑπογράφασα, ἀγαθῶν καὶ παλαιῶν νομοθετῶν εὐρήματα, κατὰ τούτους ἀναγκάζει καὶ ἄρχειν καὶ ἄρχεσθαι, ὅς δ’ ἂν ἐκτὸς βαίῃ τούτων, κολάζει· (...). “And when they are released from their schooling the city next compels them to learn the laws and to live according to them as after a pattern, that their conduct may not be swayed by their own light fancies, but just as writing-masters first draw letters in faint outline with the pen for their less advanced pupils, and then give them the copy-book and make them write according to the guidance of their lines, so the city sketches out for them the laws devised by good lawgivers of yore, and constrains them to govern and be governed according to these. She punishes anyone who steps outside these borders, (...)” (transl. Lamb).

is found wanting on this point. This concern for the ‘correctness’ of poetical expressions of ideas on political virtue seems to be the central element of the concept of ὀρθοέπεια, which is said to be a main contribution by Protagoras to the theory of rhetoric in Plato’s *Phaedrus*.²⁹

The study of the use of individual words and linguistic forms in poetic texts certainly seems to fall under the scope of ὀρθοέπεια. In Plato’s *Cratylus* 391 C 3–5, Socrates suggests that Hermogenes’ brother Callias learned from Protagoras about the ‘correctness of names’ (τὴν ὀρθότητα περὶ τῶν τοιούτων ἦν ἔμαθεν παρὰ Πρωταγόρου), meaning that individual words and proper names should give reliable information as to what their referents really are, and that they should be etymologically explicable as giving a meaningful explanation of their referents. There is no indication that etymology as practised systematically in the *Cratylus* was a central concern of Protagoras,³⁰ but he probably did point out that the words as they are used in common language do not always show a clear and unequivocal correspondence to the qualities of the things and entities to which they refer. Protagoras’ criticism of feminine words referring to masculine things seems to point to a mismatch in exactly this respect. This indicates that ὀρθοέπεια includes a concern for the ‘correct’ use of individual words as attested in the ‘linguistic’ fragments, but it seems unlikely that this was Protagoras’ *only* concern.³¹ On the evidence of the sophist’s activities as portrayed in the

²⁹ Plato *Phdr.* 267 C 4–7. Fehling 1965, 216; 1976, 345: “Danach sollte klar sein, daß er nach dieser Stelle zu interpretieren ist [Plato *Prot.* 338 E 6–339 A 3] und die Richtigkeit der individuellen Ausdrucksweise des Dichters bezeichnet.” Cp. also Guthrie 1969, 205; Brancacci 2002, 176. Democritus is credited with a similar concern for correctness of poetic diction, see the title Περί Ὀμήρου ἢ ὀρθοεπειῆς καὶ γλωσσῶν: DL 9.48; DK 68 B 20a, II.147.1. As Radermacher 1951, 36 notes, the phrase in Philodemus, *Rhetoric* 4 (Sudhaus I.192.12–15) τὰ | [θ’ ὑποδε]ίγματα [τῆς ἐν] τῇ | [λέξει κα]χεξίας παρατιθείς | [καὶ προσ]αγορεύων τὴν διάφευ- | [ξιν αὐτ]ῶν ὀρθοέπειαν, providing the examples of a bad style in poetic diction, and calling the avoidance of these ‘correctness of utterance’, may contain a reference to Protagoras or one of his followers. It is conceivable indeed that the type of linguistic error Protagoras criticised might be circumscribed as a ‘bad style in diction’ (καχεξία ἐν τῇ λέξει).

³⁰ Cp. Fehling 1965, 216; 1976, 345. As Fehling points out, in the *Cratylus*, Homer and the poets are mentioned as a second best authority on this ὀρθότης after Protagoras (391 C 10–D 1), and Protagoras is unlikely to have concerned himself with etymology more systematically than any of these poets. Closer perhaps to the concerns of the *Cratylus* is Prodicus, who is mentioned as an authority on ὀνομάτων ὀρθότης in Plato *Euthyd.* 277 E 4, which is explained as a concern for distinguishing subtle differences in the semantics of near-synonyms. Cp. Fehling 1976, 346; Brancacci 2002, 180.

³¹ For this view, see, e.g., Di Cesare 1991, 101–104; Schmitter 2000, 358 (two main concerns: “Herstellung der Sachgemäßheit der Bezeichnungen”, “Beseitigung morphologischer Anomalien”).

Platonic *Protagoras*, Protagoras' ὀρθοέπεια seems to have been more inclusive: its main goal must have been to test the contents of whole pieces of poetic discourse.³²

And Protagoras' treatment of the poets does not seem to have been exclusively concerned with pointing out putative mistakes. In a scholium on *Il.* 21.240, Protagoras is said to have interpreted the dialogue between Achilles and the river Xanthus in terms of poetic technique: apparently, he pointed out that the scene makes a particularly effective transition from the heroic battlefield to the battle between the gods, besides of the fact that it contributes to the praise of Achilles.³³ Here we have a philological observation about narrative technique concerning the correctness of poetic composition in a far broader sense: that of the relation between various parts of a narrative poetic text.³⁴

If indeed the main focus of ὀρθοέπεια is on the consistency of content of poetic texts, this focus is perhaps already implied by the use of the term ὀρθός.³⁵ If applied to single words, statements, or concepts, the term would suggest that these words are used 'correctly' in the sense that the words make clear what things are. This is the use that seems to be behind Prodicus' use of the term ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων (Plato *Euthyd.* 277 E 4, *Crat.* 384 A 6–7). In *Prot.* 337 A 1–C 4, we observe Prodicus giving a mini-lecture on the subtle semantic differences between 'impartial' (κοινός) and 'indiscriminate' (ἴσος), 'disagreeing' (ἀμφισβητεῖν) and 'quarrelling' (ἐρίζειν) and the like, in order to capture the differences between different types of behaviour in real life.

³² Classen 1976(a), 224–225 explains the term ὀρθοέπεια by means of Hermias' gloss κυριολεξία (Hermias *In Phdr.* 267 C 6, 239.14–16 Couvreur: τὸ δὲ ὀρθοέπειά γέ τις· τουτέστι κυριολεξία· διὰ γὰρ τῶν κυρίων ὀνομάτων μετήρχετο ὁ Πρωταγόρας τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐ διὰ παραβολῶν καὶ ἐπιθέτων.), and concludes that "Protagoras was aiming at a lucid, unequivocal mode of expression, exactly reflecting the thoughts of the speaker who thus can feel confident that his words will carry conviction", eliminating metaphors and other ambivalent forms of expression. But Hermias' gloss, stemming from the fourth century AD, seems influenced by the later tradition, and there is no good evidence that Protagoras aimed at a deliberately unequivocal style; on the evidence of the parody in Plato's *Protagoras*, his style was shot through with poeticisms.

³³ *Schol. in Il.* 21.240 (*POxy* 221, 2.68 Grenfell-Hunt) Πρωταγόρας φησ[ιν πρὸς] τὸ διαλαβεῖν τὴν μάχην τὸ ἐ[π]εισόδιον γεγενῆσθαι τὸ ἐξῆς τῆς Ξά[νθου κα]ὶ θνητοῦ μάχης ἵν' εἰς τὴν θεο[μαχία]ν μεταβῇ, τάχα δὲ ἴνα καὶ τὸν [Ἀχιλλ]έ[α] αὐξήσῃ. "Protagoras says that the following episode of the fight between Xanthus and a mortal was intended to divide the battle, in order that the poet might make the transition to the battle of the gods; but perhaps it was also in order that he might exalt Achilles."

³⁴ Cp. Guthrie 1969, 269.

³⁵ On the use of ὀρθός, cp. Gagarin 2002, 26–27.

Similarly, if someone is ‘rightly’, ὀρθῶς, called a ‘φίλος’, the term is applied correctly in the sense that its referent does indeed display the behaviour typical of ‘true’ friends (e.g., Eur. *Andr.* 376–377 οἱ φίλοι | ὀρθῶς πεφύκας, *HF* 56 οἱ δ’ ὄντες ὀρθῶς [sc. φίλοι], *IT* 610 τοῖς φίλοις τ’ ὀρθῶς φίλος). In such cases, then, the ‘correct’ use of a word or expression means that the semantics of the word correctly describe what its referents are like in reality: the term ὀρθός signals a straight correspondence between the semantics of a word and the characteristics of the referent to which it is applied.

With actions, the addition of ὀρθῶς implies that the action is performed ‘rightly’, i.e., on good grounds or according to the norm. Thus, for instance, Helen deplores her fate ‘for good reasons’ (Eur. *Hel.* 1226 ὀρθῶς μὲν ἦδε συμφορὰ δακρύεται), and σωφρονεῖν can be circumscribed as ‘behaving according to the norm’ (Plato *Prot.* 332 A 6 πράττωσιν ... ὀρθῶς).³⁶ Here again, ὀρθῶς signals a straight correspondence, not between a word and its reference this time, but rather between human actions and the situations to which these actions respond. It seems likely that Protagoras’ own discourse on ‘things handled ‘incorrectly’ by mankind’ (Περὶ τῶν οὐκ ὀρθῶς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πρᾶσσομένων, *DL* 9.55; *DK* 80 B 8e, II.267.12) similarly signalled ‘mismatches’ between human behaviour and the situations in which that behaviour occurs.

Finally, if the term ὀρθῶς is applied to reasoning or discourse, the focus shifts to the contents of that discourse: a correct discourse is ‘correct’ if there are no apparent contradictions between the various elements of its argumentation. A good example is Antiphon fr. 44, where Antiphon claims that ‘advantages’ laid down by the law are restraints on nature, and hence not truly advantageous, from which he concludes that it is wrong to say that painful things (such as these lawful restraints) are more advantageous than pleasurable things. There is no ‘correct account’ that can be given to support the claim that the restraints put down by the law are ‘more advantageous’ than the pleasures they inhibit.

[7]

[τὰ] δὲ ξυμφέρ[οντα,] | τὰ μὲν ὑπ[ὸ τῶν] | νόμων κε[ί-] | μενα, δεσμ[οῖ] | τῆς
φύσεώς ἐ[στι,] | τὰ δ’ ὑπὸ τῆς φύ- | σεως ἐλεύθερα. [οὐ-] | κουν τὰ ἀλγύ- | νοντα
ὀρθῶ γε λ[ό-] | γω δύνησιν τῇ[ν] | φύσιν μάλλον | ἢ τὰ εὐφραίνον- | τα· οὐκουν [ἄ]ν
οὐ- | δὲ ξυμφέρον- | τ’ εἴη τὰ λυποῦ[ντα] | μάλλον ἢ τ[ὰ ἡ-] | δοντ[α]. τὰ γὰρ τῷ |
ἀλη[θε]ῖ ξυμφέ- | ρ[οντ]α οὐ βλά- | π[τει]ν δεῖ, ἀλ[λ’] ὥ- | φ[ε]λεῖν.

³⁶ For other examples, see, e.g., Antiphon 1.10 ὅτι ὀρθῶς καὶ δικαίως μετέρχομαι τὸν φονέα τοῦ πατρός, “(this shows) that I have good reasons to prosecute the man who killed my father”; or 2.2.10 τοὺς τε ἀποκτείναντας καὶ οὐ τοὺς αἰτίαν ἔχοντας ἀποκτείνειν ὀρθῶς ἂν καταλαμβάνοιτε, “you would do well to catch actual killers, not those accused of having killed.”

The advantages laid down by the laws are bonds on nature, but those laid down by nature are free. Thus things that cause pain do not, according to a correct account, benefit nature more than things that cause joy. Nor would things that cause grief be more advantageous than things that cause pleasure; for things that are in truth advantageous must not harm but benefit.

Antiphon DK 87 B 44, col. 4.1–22, II.349 with transl. Gagarin 2002, 185

Antiphon's argument departs from the observation that the prescriptions of the law are 'bonds' on nature: they impose painful restrictions on natural desires; to that extent, the laws 'harm' their subjects. And given that things that are truly advantageous must benefit rather than harm, the laws cannot 'correctly' be said to be truly advantageous to nature. The whole passage attacks a popular belief ('the restrictions imposed by the law are naturally advantageous') by pointing out that there is no consistent account that can be given in its defence. The 'correctness' of the reasoning required here lies in a consistency between the various steps of an argument, and hence between the various elements of a stretch of discourse itself. Here, the consistency is inherently linguistic, and the 'truth' of an argument (its correspondence to things out there in the real world) is secondary to its consistency.

Protagoras also seems to have concerned himself with this type of 'correct', 'consistent' reasoning. According to Plutarch, Protagoras and Pericles discussed an accident at a sports event, and debated the question whether it was the javelin, or the athlete who threw it, or the organisers of the match, who were to be held responsible for the death of the victim:

[8]

τὸ δὲ μεिरάκιον ὁ Ξάνθιππος ἐπὶ τούτῳ χαλεπῶς διατεθεὶς ἐλοιδορεῖ τὸν πατέρα, πρῶτον μὲν ἐκφέρων ἐπὶ γέλῳ τὰς οἴκοι διατριβὰς αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς λόγους οὕς ἐποιεῖτο μετὰ τῶν σοφιστῶν. πεντάθλου γάρ τινος ἀκοντίῳ πατάξαντος Ἐπίτιμον τὸν Φαρσάλιον ἀκουσίως καὶ κτείναντος, ἡμέραν ὅλην ἀναλῶσαι μετὰ Πρωταγόρου διαπορούντα, πότερον τὸ ἀκόντιον ἢ τὸν βαλόντα μᾶλλον ἢ τοὺς ἀγνωσθέντας κατὰ τὸν ὀρθότατον λόγον αἰτίους χρῆ τοῦ πάθους ἡγεῖσθαι.

The young man Xanthippus became ill disposed at this, and started to revile his father (Pericles). The first thing he did was to make public, in order to make men laugh, the way in which his father spent his time at home and the discussions he had with the sophists. For example when a certain athlete had accidentally hit Epitimus the Pharsalian with a javelin and killed him, Pericles allegedly spent a whole day with Protagoras discussing the dilemma whether it was the javelin, or the one who hurled it, or the organisers of the match who were to be held responsible for the accident on the most correct account.

Plut. *Pericles* 36.4–5; DK 80 A 10, II.257.14–17

In a case like this, the facts are clear and it seems obvious who is responsible for bringing them about: the athlete who hurled the javelin. But we find

Protagoras and Pericles challenging precisely this automatic assumption, and discussing the issue who is responsible according to the “most correct account”.³⁷ Antiphon’s *Second Tetralogy* discusses a similar issue, in which the defence argues that the boy who killed a slave with a javelin was not to blame, for the boy who threw the javelin did do nothing irregular, whereas the slave made the mistake of running in early, and thus practically killed himself.³⁸ For a litigant defending a ‘weak’ position in court, it would seem a vital strategy to point out that *prima facie* assumptions about responsibility need not be *correct* assumptions,³⁹ and to demolish the case of their opponent by means of a subtle but ‘consistent’ account that reframes the facts in such a way that responsibility is assigned to some other party. In the case of issues of responsibility, objective ‘truths’ can rarely be established; in the absence of these, an account that makes sense of the facts in a compelling and ‘consistent’ manner, stands the next best chance of being ‘true’. Speakers need to prevail over their opponents by offering accounts that may not be *prima facie* self-evident but hold up well when scrutinized for the consistency of their reasoning. Ultimately, this would seem to be the main reason why Protagoras devoted so much energy to the analysis of ‘correct accounts’.⁴⁰

It seems reasonable to suppose that Protagoras’ analysis of poetic texts ultimately serves the goal of analysing and testing political and juridical discourse. By demonstrating that Homer was incongruous in his vocabulary, and that Simonides was inconsistent in his moral ideas, Protagoras did not only impress his audience with his ability to challenge the views of the highest moral authorities, the poets. He also gave his students an object lesson on the type of reasoning they could employ in demolishing the positions of their opponents and asserting their own. In the Greek tradition, poets were widely regarded as authorities on ἀρετή, and poetry had a formative influence on popular morality.

³⁷ Cp. Gagarin 2002, 27.

³⁸ For Antiphon’s *Second Tetralogy*, see Gagarin 2002, 119–127. Gorgias’ *Helen* likewise offers a ‘reasoning’ (λογισμός) that frees Helen from all responsibility for the Trojan War without altering the established facts of the mythical tradition, cp. Buchheim 1989, 161 n. 8. It seems that ‘responsibility’ was a hotly debated issue in the fifth century, and Protagoras is likely to have been one of the major voices contributing to the debate.

³⁹ For the phraseology connected with ‘(in)correct reasoning’, one may compare Hippocr. *De arte* 7 ὡν οἱ μὴ ὀρθῶς λογιζόμενοι τὰς αἰτίας τοῖς οὐδὲν αἰτίοις ἀνατιθέασι, τοὺς αἰτίους ἐλευθεροῦντες (“For this, those who do not reason correctly blame the innocent, while they excuse the ones who are responsible”). As in the passage from Plutarch, ‘correct reasoning’ here consists of an interpretation on the basis of observable facts.

⁴⁰ Cp. Sicking 1998(a), 191–192.

Speakers in the courts or in the assembly would, therefore, have to be aware of the moral views expressed in poetry, and to be able to address and possibly 'correct' these views for their own persuasive purposes. This seems to be what is behind Protagoras' claim in *Prot.* 338 E 6–339 A 3 that a vital part of education is to be skilled in dealing with poetry. Speakers who wished to examine their culture's views on issues of right and wrong could not do better than to study the 'good' poems that formed the best-known and most eloquent expressions of these views. In training their ability to analyse these good examples of moral discourse, they train their minds to analyse the political and juridical discourse of their adversaries. In all these types of discourse, language is the medium *par excellence* through which ἀρετή can be transmitted, and this seems to have stimulated Protagoras' lively interest in the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' of language as a medium.

This interest in linguistic matters is likely to have covered issues concerning the coherence and consistency of poetic discourse as well as observations regarding the correct use of isolated words and phrases. Surely, our sources give a rather limited representation of Protagoras' contributions to the field; they can indeed give the impression that Protagoras merely criticised the use of isolated words. This can have added to posterity's impression that he "ignored what speakers meant to say and addressed their formulations instead".⁴¹

5. ORTHOEPEIA AND SOPHISTIC ORATORY: CORRECT *LOGOI* IN THE WORLD OF MAN THE MEASURE

In the last section, we saw how Protagoras' interest in poetry can be partly explained by the central position of poetry in moral and ethical discourse. In the present section, I will argue that Protagoras' way of analysing the 'correctness' of poems as pieces of relevant moral discourse accords well with his view that man is the measure of everything. Protagoras was active in a society where juridical and political issues were discussed and decided on the basis of competing *logoi* that had to be measured against one another in the judgement of a mass audience of citizens. Greek poetry offered time-honoured expressions of ethical views that were widely accepted, and to that extent had stood the test of measurement by this 'human measure'. The

⁴¹ DL 9.52 τὴν διάνοιαν ἀφείς πρὸς τοῦνομα διελέχθη, "he ignored intentions and debated on the level of formulations".

ability to analyse and criticise these authoritative texts amounts to the mastery of Greek social and political discourse, a vital requirement for those who wished to make their mark in the public life of the *polis*.

Protagoras' *homo mensura* statement is beyond doubt the most widely debated among all the fragments of the fifth century sophists. Indeed, *HM* aims to shock and puzzle its audience by means of its cryptic and seemingly paradoxical phraseology rather than to say clearly and unequivocally what its author means.⁴² It must have served as a teasing starter to a startling piece of discourse, and, given the loss of its context, we have no means to say how Protagoras developed his claim in the course of his argument.

Nearly every element in the phraseology of *HM* is ambiguous. Does πάντων χρημάτων refer to concrete objects or more generally to 'everything'?⁴³ Is the verb εἶναι to be taken in the sense of 'existing' or more generally in the sense of 'being the case', or as copulative, 'being such or such'?⁴⁴ Is ὥς to be translated as 'that' or 'how'?⁴⁵ Is μέτρον to be taken in the general sense of 'measure' or in the more restricted sense of 'criterion' with its technical epistemological implications?⁴⁶ Is 'man', ἄνθρωπος, to be understood as referring to each

⁴² For a comprehensive survey, see Huss 1996. On the surprising novelty of the phrase, cp. Buchheim 1986, 45–46, and Van Berkel in the present volume, 37 ff.; on its ambiguities, see esp. Neumann 1976, who is generally too pessimistic, however, about the possibilities for interpreting *HM*.

⁴³ 'Everything': H. Gomperz 1912, 201–202; Capizzi ²1955, 105; Untersteiner ²1961, 129; Guthrie 1969, 190–192; Bernsen 1969, 115; Dodds 1973, 96; Emsbach 1980, 75; Mansfeld 1981, 43; Buchheim 1986, 47; Sicking 1998, 173. Concrete objects and their qualities: Von Fritz 1957, 914; Classen 1989, 16. 'Things we are concerned with' (stressing the etymological connection of χρήματα and χρῆσθαι): Nestle ²1942, 269–271; Versényi 1976, 294; Heitzsch 1976, 302 n. 12. Social values: Dupréel 1948, 25. Von Fritz and Classen strongly connect *HM* with the field of sense perception. For Dupréel, *HM* relates exclusively to human action in the life of the πόλις. Most other interpreters allow for a more inclusive interpretation of 'everything'.

⁴⁴ Existential use ('exist'): H. Gomperz ⁴1922, 374–376; Th. Gomperz 1912, 202–203; Levi 1940, 149. Copulative use ('be such and such'): Nestle ²1942, 271; Capizzi ²1955, 118–121; Guthrie 1969, 184–187; Kerferd 1981, 86; Classen 1989, 16; Buchheim 1986, 62. Veridical use ('be the case'): Natorp 1891, 286–287; Covotti 1896, 122; Bernsen 1969, 115; Kahn 1973, 340 n. 12; Bühler 1989, 17 n. 5. 'Exist' and 'be the case': Mansfeld 1981, 43. 'Exist' and 'be such and such': Dietz 1976, 49. All three uses: Versényi 1976, 295.

⁴⁵ 'That': H. Gomperz 1912, 203–204, Th. Gomperz ⁴1922, 362–363; Bernsen 1969, 114; Heitzsch 1969, 302; Lesky ³1971, 391; Guthrie 1969, 189–190; Mansfeld 1981, 43. 'How' (on the basis of Plato's interpretation of ὥς = οἷα): Seliger 1889, 404–405; Classen 1989, 15, 27. Both 'that' and 'how': Zeller ⁶1920, 1355 n. 1; Capizzi ²1955, 118–119; Koch 1970, 46 n. 1; Versényi 1976, 295; Buchheim 1986, 64; Bühler 1989, 22 n. 22.

⁴⁶ Criterion: H. Gomperz 1912, 203–204; Nestle ²1942, 271; Guthrie 1969, 183; Levi 1966, 109–110; Neumann 1976, 264; Classen 1989, 16. Bodily measure: Dupréel 1948, 52. Controller: Untersteiner ²1961, 131–135. Limit/norm: Capizzi 1995, 108–111. 'Full Measure': Buchheim 1986, 48–52 ("[der] Punkt, die Markierung, an dem das Maß voll wird", 49). The interpretation

individual human being, or generically to mankind as a species, or collectively to man as the member of a social group or community?⁴⁷ If man is 'man the individual', we seem to be close to the individualism, or even relativism, ascribed to Protagoras in Plato's *Theaetetus*;⁴⁸ but if 'man' is to be taken as 'man the species' or 'man the political animal', Protagoras leaves considerably more room for consensus between the members of any given society. This seems especially relevant in connection with the question to which domain of human life *HM* is meant to apply. While it may be doubtful whether Protagoras used *HM* to develop a theory of epistemological relativism, as he is made to do in Plato's *Theaetetus*, it seems rather less controversial that *HM* had some relevance for the fields of law and politics. The political implication of *HM* seems to be that man has to decide issues of right and wrong by his own standards, without appeal to an external, superhuman authority.⁴⁹

Thus, a 'minimal' reading of *HM* at least suggests that in a society of humans, moral issues are decided on the basis of purely human standards, not on the authority of some superhuman power. Right is what the majority of participants in the society consider right, and political decisions are made on the basis of consensus. We cannot be sure whether Protagoras even intended to imply that each individual human being is his own measure for issues of right and wrong.⁵⁰ In that case, consensus in society would still be

'measure' = 'criterion' is the classic interpretation based on Plato and Sextus. Other interpreters try to liberate the term from (later) epistemological connotations, and to relate it more strongly to the experience of man as part of the physical world and/or society. For the polysemy of μέτρον in fifth-century Greek, see Buchheim 1986, and Van Berkel in the present volume: cp. n. 42 above.

⁴⁷ Generic use ('man the species' as opposed to gods, animals): Halbfass 1884, esp. 163–165; Th. Gomperz ⁴1922, 373. Individual use: Natorp 1884, 42, 48; Covotti 1896, 122, 128; Zeller ⁶1920 1357–1359; Levi 1940, 150; Guthrie 1969, 183, 188–189; Lesky ³1971, 392; Kerferd 1981, 86; Mansfeld 1981, 43; Buchheim 1986, 47; Bühler 1989, 17 n. 5; Classen 1989, 16; Sicking 1998, 173. Collective use: H. Gomperz 1912, 217–222; Nestle ²1942, 273; Dupréel 1948, 23–24. All three uses intended: Untersteiner ²1961, 78, 84; Versényi 1976, 290–297; Dietz 1976, 48. Halbfass and Th. Gomperz are extremely sceptical about Plato's *Theaetetus* as a source for the historical Protagoras, while most scholars who interpret 'man' in the individual sense are generally more inclined to accept at least some aspects of Plato's interpretation of Protagoras. Nestle and Dupréel stress the importance of *HM* to the community of the πόλις.

⁴⁸ But it seems to be generally accepted that the epistemological discussions in the *Theaetetus* reflect Platonic concerns rather than authentic Protagorean thought, see H. Gomperz 1912, 229; Neumann 1976, 267–269; Versényi 1976, 291–293; Dietz 1976, 46–65 (esp. 53).

⁴⁹ Cp. Langerbeck 1935, 24–25; Dupréel 1948, 23–24; Nestle ²1942, 273; Luther 1966, 163–164; Guthrie 1969, 187; Koch 1970, 46–47; Cole 1972, 22–26; Mansfeld 1981, 47–48; Buchheim 1986, 77–79; Sicking 1998, 179.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Classen 1989, esp. 27.

possible, but seems far more difficult to reach. The most likely reading is perhaps that *HM* meant that political issues are decided on the basis of a broad consensus between the majority of members of human society; the idea that political issues are decided on the basis of a cooperative type of public discourse also seems to be behind Protagoras' great speech in the Platonic *Protagoras*, which squares nicely with what the indirect testimony tells about Protagoras' respect for traditional morality.⁵¹ In legal and political issues, consensus has to be reached by means of verbal communication with one's fellow humans. The positions of competing speakers are 'measured by the human measure', and this means that they are tested for consistency by means of an investigation of their verbal articulation.⁵²

This implies that the best way to attack the ideas of an opponent is to undermine their authority by demonstrating their lack of consistency.⁵³ For political speakers, poetry offers the material from which one may learn how to attack moral positions, and the lessons offered by poetry are directly applicable in the context of forensic or political discourse. Indeed, it seems to be in this context of the discussion of λόγοι concerning public issues that Protagoras' interest in the correctness of poetry and language most naturally finds its place. The pupils of the great sophist study literary texts because these offer access to important human views concerning 'right and wrong' and therefore provide an ideal training ground for the analysis and criticism of these views. In this context, a thorough understanding of the 'correct' use of language is vital, because it enables one to see whether the poets formulated their views consistently and correctly.

⁵¹ E.g., Timon of Phlius, quoted in Sextus Empiricus *Adv. Math.* 9.57, describes Protagoras as πάντων ἔχων φυλακὴν ἐπεικείνης, "giving heed to all the rules of fairness". Similarly, in Plato *Prot.* 333 B 8–C 3 Protagoras refuses to agree with the 'many' that it is possible to be prudent while committing injustice (ἀδικῶν σωφρονεῖν).

⁵² One of Protagoras' writings quoted by DL 9.55 (DK 80 B 8e, II.267.12), Περὶ τῶν οὐκ ὀρθῶς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πρασσόμενων, may well have dealt with similar questions of correctness in moral and ethical issues; cp. Th. Gomperz 1922, 369.

⁵³ In the present volume, Woodruff argues that a central element of the political virtue of εὐβουλία is the ability to give the strongest possible argumentation for conflicting views on ethical matters, in order to be able to test them and see which of these views is best and should prevail (179 ff., esp. 190–193).

6. CONCLUSION

On balance, then, our evidence suggests that Protagoras took a lively interest in the ‘correctness’ of human discourse, either in the form of ὀρθοέπεια or ‘correct utterance’ in poetry or in the analysis of the consistency of reasoning in forensic and political speeches. Poetry offered important statements on ethical questions, but these statements were not above analysis and criticism: they were to be tested to see whether they were correctly and consistently formulated. In both cases, Protagoras seems to have taught his students a critical attitude towards even the most sacrosanct texts of the Greek tradition, in order to train their critical facilities. As such, poetry offered an ideal field of practice for dealing with the speeches of opponents in court or council.

The criterion of ὀρθοέπεια partly concerns itself with the ‘philological’ study of poetic diction, focusing on the correct use of isolated elements of poetic diction like words or verb forms. But besides, it investigates the ‘correctness’ or ‘consistency’ of whole poetic texts.

Thus the study of poetic texts is central to Protagoras’ activities as a teacher of political ἀρετή. Protagoras claims that a central element of education is to become skilled in dealing with poetry (Plato *Prot.* 338 E 7–339 A 1 περὶ ἐπῶν δεινὸν εἶναι), because poetry offers time-honoured statements on what it means to be a good citizen. To acquire the ability to analyse, criticize and ‘correct’ these statements is to learn how to master the public discourse of the Greek cities. Therefore, the requirement to be good at dealing with poetry is vital as a training ground for anyone who wishes to make effective use of the medium of spoken discourse in the public life of the *polis*. And Protagoras’ interest in language and linguistic phenomena is not a separate and peripheral subject within the sophist’s curriculum; it contributes directly to the main goal of his education, the transmission of political ἀρετή.

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CHAPTER SIX

L'EFFICACITÉ EN POLITIQUE SELON LE *PROTAGORAS* DE PLATON

Paul Demont

On connaît les paradoxes de la mise en scène platonicienne du Protagoras historique. Dans le dialogue *Protagoras*, à travers un récit attribué à Socrate lui-même, Protagoras est l'un des personnages, à une date dramatique qui n'est pas entièrement cohérente, mais peut être considérée comme antérieure au début de la guerre du Péloponnèse (431 av. J.-C.): les fils de Périclès sont vivants, le poète Agathon est encore un jeune homme. Protagoras y déclare: «J'ai déjà vécu un grand nombre d'années, et il n'est aucun d'entre vous dont je ne puisse, vu mon âge, être le père» (317 C 2–3).¹ Le lecteur doit comprendre que les propos de ce Protagoras sont authentiques, mais cette authenticité, faute de parallèle, est bien difficile à vérifier.² En revanche, Protagoras n'est que mentionné dans le *Théétète*,³

¹ Le texte grec du *Protagoras* est cité ici d'après l'édition de Croiset & Bodin 1923 (mais la numérotation des lignes renvoie aux éditions des *OCT*) et la traduction d'après Trédé & Demont 1993.

² Le parallèle le plus précis est difficile à interpréter. Il est souvent omis par les commentateurs, par exemple dans l'étude la plus critique, et même hypercritique, à l'égard de toute authenticité protagoréenne, celle de Maguire 1977. Dans le fameux mythe qu'il prête à Protagoras, à en juger par l'emploi exceptionnel des composés πολυγονία et ὀλιγογονία dans un contexte similaire et à l'inversion du thème de la 'sagesse', Platon joue peut-être sur le texte d'Hérodote (3.108), dont il est possible aussi que Protagoras soit une source orale ou écrite, commune à Hérodote et à Platon. Cf. (précisant une observation de W. Nestle) Demont 1994a et Demont 2011, dont je résume ici la conclusion: le texte d'Hérodote (A: καὶ κως τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ προνοίᾳ, ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι, ἐοῦσα σοφῇ, B: ὅσα μὲν [γὰρ] ψυχὴν τε δειλὰ καὶ ἐδῶδιμα, ταῦτα μὲν πάντα πολύγονα πεποίηκε, ἵνα μὴ ἐπιλίπη κατεσθιόμενα, ὅσα δὲ σχέτλια καὶ ἀνιηρά, ὀλιγόγονα) est renversé chez Platon, *Prot.* 321 B 5–7 (B': καὶ τοῖς μὲν ὀλιγογονίαν προσήψε, τοῖς δ' ἀναλίσκομενοῖς ὑπὸ τούτων πολυγονίαν, σωτηρίαν τῷ γένει πορίζων. A': ἄτε δὴ οὖν οὐ πάνυ τι σοφὸς ὢν ὁ Ἐπιμηθεύς ...). En B et en B', le même thème est repris. Mais en A et A', alors que, d'un côté, chez Hérodote, est soulignée la pro-noïa du divin, de l'autre, chez Platon, on est en présence d'Ἐπι-μέθεε; d'un côté, une quasi-certitude (οἰκός) de 'sagesse', de l'autre l'évidence d'une «sagesse ... imparfaite» (avec la litote οὐ πάνυ τι).

³ Le texte grec du *Théétète* est cité ici d'après l'édition de Diès 1926 (mais la numérotation des lignes renvoie à la nouvelle édition des *OCT*). Voir aussi Nancy ²1995. Les traductions proposées ici sont, sauf indication contraire, personnelles.

comme étant mort depuis longtemps. De plus la date dramatique du dialogue l'éloigne encore de l'époque de Protagoras, puisqu'elle est postérieure à une bataille devant Corinthe qui peut être celle de 394 ou celle de 369.⁴ Théétète ne connaît sa fameuse maxime sur l'homme-mesure que pour l'avoir lue, et «souvent, même» (152 A 2–5). Puis, quand Socrate invente une apologie qu'il aurait pu prononcer (166 A 2–168 C 2), Platon insiste sur le caractère fictif de cette reconstruction faite pour «venir au secours de» Protagoras (168 C 2–4). Pourtant, ce Protagoras-là renvoie en même temps à ses œuvres écrites (166 C 9). Et de ce Protagoras fictif et lointain, celui du *Théétète*, on entend une citation littérale, authentifiée par plusieurs lecteurs, et par le Protagoras fictif (166 D 1). D'un côté, donc, un tableau d'un Protagoras réel aux propos impossibles à authentifier, de l'autre, une citation explicite d'une œuvre écrite qu'on peut lire facilement, puis une 'apologie' de la citation présentée par un Protagoras décrit comme fictif, dans le cadre d'une interprétation socratique. L'enquête qui suit va ajouter un élément de complexité supplémentaire à ces paradoxes. Elle porte sur la question de l'efficacité en matière politique, qui était selon Platon au cœur de l'enseignement de Protagoras, et plus particulièrement sur la comparaison entre cette efficacité et celle du médecin en matière de santé.⁵

L'art que Platon attribue au sophiste est défini ainsi dans le *Protagoras* : «savoir comment gérer au mieux sa propre maison et comment être le plus apte (δυνατώτατος) à diriger la cité par les actes et par les paroles» (318 E 6–319 A 2);⁶ et dans le *Théétète* : «Les orateurs sages et bons font que les cités estiment juste (δίκαια δοκεῖν εἶναι ποιεῖν) ce qui est bon pour elles au lieu de ce qui est pernicieux. En effet, tout ce qu'une cité estime juste et beau, cela l'est aussi pour elle tant qu'elle le considère comme tel, mais le sage fait qu'au

⁴ Je ne crois pas que Platon fasse une présentation ironique de la mort 'piteuse' (cf. en dernier lieu Narcy 1995, 33–39) de Théétète par dysenterie à la suite de cette bataille. Cette dysenterie qui frappe l'armée et Théétète doit être un fait connu, auquel le prologue ajoute, semble-t-il, la mention, qui n'était pas nécessaire, de la belle conduite du jeune homme : il s'est comporté, dit Euclide, en καλὸν τε καὶ ἀγαθόν (*Tht.* 142 B 7). Euclide justifie cette qualification (142 B 7–8 : ἐπεὶ τοι καὶ νῦν ἤκουόν τινων μάλα ἐγκωμιαζόντων αὐτὸν περὶ τὴν μάχην, que je comprends comme Auguste Diès, «on faisait, devant moi, force éloges de sa conduite pendant la bataille»). Terpsion ajoute ensuite (142 B 9–C 1) : «Cela n'a vraiment rien d'étrange : au contraire, il aurait été vraiment étonnant qu'il ne soit pas tel que tu le dis», ce qui signifie qu'il n'est pas étonnant qu'il se soit bien comporté dans la bataille, étant donné qu'il était καλός τε καὶ ἀγαθός aussi dans le reste de sa vie. Les circonstances politiques de la bataille sont laissées entièrement de côté par Platon et n'ont donc pas à intervenir dans l'interprétation.

⁵ Je prolonge et complète ici deux études antérieures : Demont 2004 et Demont 2005.

⁶ «What may be the only authentic pronouncement of Protagoras in the entire dialogue», estime Maguire 1977, 104–105. Cf. Woodruff, 179–193 in this volume.

lieu de chaque chose qui est pernicieuse pour les habitants, soit et apparaisse quelque chose de bon. C'est d'après le même raisonnement que le sophiste aussi, s'il est capable (*δυνάμενος*) d'éduquer ses élèves de cette façon, est sage » (167 C 2–D 1). Cette capacité ou efficacité, on le voit, est à deux niveaux : (1) elle consiste à savoir éduquer ceux qui seront efficaces en politique, et (2) elle consiste pour les élèves du sophiste, voire pour le sophiste lui-même—qui, par exemple, proposera des lois à la cité de Thourioi—, à être capables de diriger la cité, le cas échéant en modifiant sa conception de la justice. Le premier niveau correspond à un aspect essentiel de la définition de la *technè* au cinquième siècle : est un art ce qui est susceptible d'être enseigné ;⁷ le second niveau met plus précisément en jeu l'efficacité revendiquée par Protagoras dans la maison et dans la cité.

Selon Platon dans le *Théétète*, « Protagoras » (nous distinguerons par des guillemets le Protagoras de l'apologie du Protagoras historique) compare le second niveau d'efficacité à l'efficacité du médecin en matière de santé. Cette comparaison fait-elle partie de la stratégie argumentative de Platon, et non de Protagoras ? Elle permet en effet à Platon-Socrate, une fois que, dans son apologie, « Protagoras » a repris cette comparaison à la discussion de sa formule par Socrate, de faire observer à son lecteur, comme le dit Aristote en résumant l'argumentation, que « l'opinion de l'ignorant n'a certainement pas une autorité égale à celle du médecin, quand il s'agit de savoir, par exemple, si le patient recouvrera ou ne recouvrera pas la santé ».⁸ Et elle permet à de nombreux spécialistes de la médecine hippocratique, comme on le verra, de soutenir qu'il n'y a rien de commun entre Protagoras et la médecine. Mais, auparavant, dans l'apologie de « Protagoras », cette comparaison joue un grand rôle, et, dit Socrate (168 C 2–4), pour venir au secours de la formule de Protagoras. Pour cette raison, on peut tenter de la comprendre dans une perspective protagoréenne, indépendamment de la critique platonicienne qui suit. Voici une partie du passage en question :

La sagesse, le sage, je suis bien loin de dire que cela n'est pas. Quand des choses néfastes (*κακά*) apparaissent et sont pour l'un d'entre nous, j'appelle sage précisément celui qui en opérant une modification (*μεταβάλλων*) les fait apparaître et être profitables (*ἀγαθά*). Ne va pas maintenant pourchasser mot à mot mes paroles, et comprends ce que je veux dire plus précisément encore. Rappelle-toi par exemple ce que nous disions auparavant, à savoir qu'au

⁷ Cf. Heinemann 1961, 105–130 (étude importante, dont le titre fait cependant difficulté : Platon n'a pas nécessairement entraîné un changement complet d'attitude des spécialistes à l'égard de leur *τέχνη*).

⁸ Aristote, *Métaphysique* 1010 b 11–14, trad. Diès 211 (*ad* Platon, *Théétète* 178 C 3–7).

malade apparaissent amères les choses qu'il mange, et elles le sont, tandis qu'au bien-portant, c'est l'inverse qui est et qui apparaît (τῷ μὲν ἀσθενοῦντι πικρὰ φαίνεται ἃ ἐσθίει καὶ ἔστι, τῷ δὲ ὑγιαίνοντι τάναντία ἔστι καὶ φαίνεται). Il ne faut pas rendre l'un des deux plus sage, ce n'est d'ailleurs pas possible, ni accuser le malade d'ignorance parce qu'il a ces opinions-là, tandis que le bien-portant serait sage parce qu'il en a de différentes, mais il faut opérer une modification vers l'état opposé (οὐδὲ κατηγορητέον ὡς ὁ μὲν κάμνων ἀμαθὴς ὅτι τοιαῦτα δοξάζει, ὁ δὲ ὑγιαίνων σοφὸς ὅτι ἄλλοια, μεταβλητέον δ' ἐπὶ θάτερα), car la seconde disposition est la meilleure. De la même façon, dans l'éducation, il faut opérer une modification de l'un des deux états vers l'état le meilleur: mais le médecin fait la modification par ses drogues (φαρμάκοις μεταβάλλει), tandis que le sophiste la fait par ses paroles. Car jamais on n'a fait que quelqu'un qui a des opinions fausses ait ensuite des opinions vraies: il n'est pas possible en effet d'avoir des opinions sans réalité, ni différentes de ce qu'on ressent, et qui est toujours vrai (οὔτε γὰρ τὰ μὴ ὄντα δυνατὸν δοξάζσαι, οὔτε ἄλλα παρ' ἃ ἂν πάσχει, ταῦτα δὲ αἰεὶ ἀληθῆ). (Platon, *Théétète*, 166 D 4–167 A 8)

Pour comprendre cette comparaison avec la médecine, il est nécessaire de recourir aux textes contemporains de la *Collection hippocratique*, et cela d'autant plus que plusieurs, notamment le traité de l'*Ancienne Médecine*,⁹ offrent des parallèles suggestifs. Le rapprochement a naturellement déjà été proposé et discuté, notamment par A. Cole.¹⁰ Joseph P. Maguire écrit à son propos:¹¹ «The details should not be pressed, any more than in an Homeric simile. If they are, the scheme falls apart; and, in addition, we may be tempted to create misleading problems for ourselves». Je voudrais pourtant courir ce risque. Notons qu'il ne s'agit pas ici de rechercher une influence protagoréenne sur la médecine ou une influence médicale sur Protagoras, mais d'abord de comprendre la comparaison utilisée dans le texte de Platon pour venir au secours de Protagoras.¹² Dans cette perspective,

⁹ Le texte grec et la traduction de l'*Ancienne Médecine* sont cités ici d'après l'édition de Jouanna 1990, dont le texte est pour l'essentiel repris par Schiefsky 2005. La traduction est parfois modifiée.

¹⁰ Cole 1972.

¹¹ Maguire 1973, 126.

¹² Ma démarche est donc différente de celles des spécialistes de la *Collection hippocratique* qui ont examiné la question. Diller 1952 défend la thèse de l'influence de Platon sur *Ancienne Médecine*, qui serait donc un ouvrage du quatrième siècle, postérieur au *Philebe*. Avec la plupart des savants, Kühn 1956 la réfute. Il estime même que «der Verfasser von de prisca medicina folgt im medizinischen Bereich den Anschauungen, die Protagoras für den gesamten Erkenntnisbereich vertreten hatte» et fait même «eine bewußte Anspielung» au titre de l'œuvre de Protagoras, la 'Vérité' (26–27). Voir aussi Herter 1963. Longrigg 1963 avait suggéré, lui, que le traité médical pourrait même avoir influencé Protagoras, et remonté donc encore sa date de rédaction au milieu du cinquième siècle. Tout en maintenant les rapprochements

ce n'est donc pas principalement le Protagoras historique, mais le Protagoras du *Théétète* qui m'intéresse, celui que Cynthia Farrar a appelé 'Platagoras'.¹³

On sait que dans le *Théétète*, avant l'apologie qui est faite par Socrate au secours de Protagoras, Platon propose une première interprétation de la 'formule de Protagoras' qui en fait un relativisme subjectiviste, concernant d'abord la sensation, puis les opinions (151 E 8–165 E 7). Ensuite, dans l'apologie de Protagoras, et notamment dans le passage que j'ai cité pour commencer, Platon prête au sophiste une reformulation vigoureuse de ce qu'il a écrit, une « version modifiée »,¹⁴ qui affirme l'existence de sages, de savants, de spécialistes. Chacune des ces deux interprétations peut être comparée au traité hippocratique de l'*Ancienne Médecine*.

Examinons d'abord le rapport entre la première interprétation platonicienne de la formule, qui se situe dans le cadre de la définition de la 'science' (ἐπιστήμη), et le texte médical.

Science, dis-tu, est sensation (αἴσθησις, φῆς, ἐπιστήμη)?—Oui.—Tu risques bien d'avoir prononcé, sur la science, une parole qui n'est pas sans valeur, mais celle que disait aussi Protagoras. Mais c'est d'une autre façon qu'il a dit ces mêmes choses. Il dit en effet, n'est-ce pas, que l'homme est mesure de toutes choses, de celles qui sont, qu'elles sont, de celles qui ne sont pas, qu'elles ne sont pas. Tu dois bien l'avoir lu?—Je l'ai lu souvent, même.—Voilà donc à peu près ce qu'il dit: telle m'apparaît chaque chose, telle elle est pour moi, et telle elle t'apparaît à toi, telle à nouveau elle est pour toi; or, tu es homme et moi aussi.—En effet, c'est bien ce qu'il dit. (Platon, *Théétète*, 151 E 6–152 A 9)

qu'il propose avec le *Philèbe*, Diller a modifié sa position en 1972 et situé le traité dans la période qui va des Sophistes aux dialogues de Platon (Diller 1975, 92–93). Jouanna fait le point sur le rapprochement avec Platon (1990, 74–85): il estime, comme d'autres, que l'absence de distinction entre τέχνη et ἐμπειρία dans le traité médical suppose qu'il soit antérieur au *Gorgias*. Cette observation donne à mon sens une importance peut-être excessive au dialogue de Platon dans l'histoire des idées, car le fondement empirique de l'art ne cesse pas d'être reconnu dans toute l'antiquité. Il suggère une datation dans les années 420–410, sans aborder la question des rapports avec le *Théétète*. Schiefsky 2005 exclut, comme on le verra *infra*, tout rapprochement avec le relativisme de Protagoras. Conscient de la difficulté que nous évoquons, il consacre un appendice à la différence entre l'empirisme du traité et l'empirisme médical ultérieur, qui suppose Platon et Aristote (2005, 345–359). Il note cependant, avec raison, que « Aristotle, like Plato, often treats τέχνη and ἐμπειρία as virtual synonyms in non-specialized contexts » et qu'Aristote « sometimes connects knowledge and experience as closely as the author of VM » (2005, 354), ce qui montre que cette opposition a surtout chez Platon une fonction polémique (dont je pense qu'elle vise principalement Isocrate), et qu'on pouvait, à l'époque de Platon, ou après Platon, continuer d'écrire et de penser indépendamment d'elle.

¹³ Farrar 1988, 50.

¹⁴ Kerferd 1999, 163–164.

Dans l'*Ancienne Médecine*, il s'agit aussi de la définition du savoir, mais plus précisément du savoir médical. L'une des découvertes de la médecine, qui prouve que c'est un savoir, une découverte d'ailleurs encore perfectible, est, dit l'auteur, celle de la médecine diététique, qui, après une première découverte humaine, l'invention de la préparation des graines, de la farine et de la confection du pain,¹⁵ assure la santé de l'homme (*VM* 3). Par rapport à cette première découverte, l'auteur insiste sur la complexité de l'art du régime médical, pris entre le risque d'affamer et celui de trop nourrir son patient, et se demande alors à quel critère exact peut se référer un tel art. On pourrait répondre légèrement, dit-il au chapitre 9, en disant qu'il suffit de ne pas donner d'aliments trop 'forts' à l'homme, mais on court alors le risque de ne pas lui donner assez à manger et de l'exposer à la faim et à la dénutrition.

Les tâches (du médecin) sont bien plus diversifiées et requièrent une exactitude bien plus grande. Il faut en effet viser à une mesure (δεῖ ... μέτρον τινὸς στοχάσασθαι); or il n'y a pas de mesure—pas plus du reste qu'un nombre ni qu'un poids—, à quoi l'on puisse se référer pour connaître ce qui est exact, si ce n'est la sensation du corps (τοῦ σώματος τὴν αἴσθησιν). Aussi est-ce un travail que d'acquérir un savoir assez exact pour ne commettre que de petites erreurs en deçà ou au-delà.¹⁶ (*VM* 9.3)

Dans le texte médical, l'expression τοῦ σώματος τὴν αἴσθησιν «la sensation du corps» est ambiguë, et a été comprise de deux façons: la perception objective et scientifique que le médecin a du corps du malade, notamment par le toucher («die objektive Reaktion des Körpers»),¹⁷ ou la perception subjective et malade que le malade a de son propre corps. Jacques Jouanna, suivi par Mark Schiefsky, estiment avec raison, me semble-t-il, que la seconde interprétation est préférable.¹⁸ «la sensation du corps» est la sensation que le malade a de son propre corps, en particulier, note Jouanna,¹⁹ parce qu'«un

¹⁵ Ce n'est pas exactement la cuisine, à laquelle les commentateurs assimilent pourtant souvent ces opérations.

¹⁶ *L'ancienne médecine* 9, 128.9–15 Jouanna; 1.588–590 Littré. (Texte de A, traduction Jacques Jouanna.)

¹⁷ Expression de Diller 1952, 401. L'interprétation est approuvée notamment par Lain-Entralgo 1975, 307–310. Voir aussi Trédé, qui procure une étude très précise de ce passage (1992, 160–169). Mais, comme me le fait observer M. van Raalte, l'interprétation de Jaeger 1938, 38, qui insiste sur le caractère individuel de la sensation experte du médecin, est un peu différente.

¹⁸ Cf. Jouanna 1990, 173–175 (note complémentaire 8).

¹⁹ Jouanna reprend aussi un parallèle étudié par Mûri 1936, avec un emploi ultérieur, dans le traité, de l'adjectif αἰσθητός (*VM* 15.4, 138.14 Jouanna). De même, Trédé 1992 et Schiefsky 2005, qui conclut: «αἴσθησις refers to the body's reaction to δυνάμεις as it is perceived by the patient», 199.

rapprochement s'impose avec les c. 1 et 2. » En effet, dans le c. 2, le médecin expose la nécessité de tenir compte de la perception qu'a le malade de son état :

Et par dessus tout, il me semble que l'on doit, lorsqu'on traite de cet art, exposer des choses qui soient concevables par les profanes (γνωστά λέγειν τοῖσι δημότησιν). Car l'objet qu'il convient de rechercher et d'exposer n'est autre que les affections (οὐ γὰρ περὶ ἄλλων τινῶν οὔτε ζητεῖν οὔτε λέγειν προσήκει ἢ περὶ τῶν παθημάτων) dont ces gens-là sont eux-mêmes atteints et dont ils souffrent. Sans doute ne leur est-il pas aisé de connaître parfaitement par eux-mêmes leurs propres affections, la façon dont elles naissent et dont elles cessent, les causes qui les font croître et décliner, puisqu'ils sont des profanes ; mais, quand elles sont découvertes et exposées par un autre, c'est facile. Car il ne s'agit de rien d'autre pour chacun que de se remémorer, en les écoutant, les accidents qui lui sont arrivés. En revanche, si l'on passe à côté de la faculté de compréhension des profanes, et si on ne met pas les gens qui écoutent dans cette disposition d'esprit, on passera à côté de la réalité (τοῦ ἐόντος).²⁰

(VM 2.3)

Selon cette interprétation de la formule « la sensation du corps », il doit donc y avoir chez le malade, en écoutant le médecin, un processus d'anamnèse. Le malade doit se voir proposer par le médecin des remarques qu'il puisse observer et vérifier sur lui-même (γνωστά pourrait être traduit par « observables » ou « vérifiables »),²¹ donc par la sensation qu'il a de son corps à lui. Je reprends donc à mon compte l'interprétation défendue par Jacques Jouanna : « la médecine (...) a pour critère l'accord du discours du médecin sur les πάθη-ματα avec ce que ressent effectivement le malade, même si le savoir causal du médecin ne doit pas être confondu avec son critère, l'αἴσθησις du malade ».²²

La restriction introduite dans cette phrase par Jouanna le conduit à refuser toute analogie avec la formule de Protagoras : « Bien que la formulation rappelle ici Protagoras (DK 80 B 1 (...)), la distance est grande entre les deux penseurs. Car si l'αἴσθησις du malade est, chez Protagoras, le critère de la réalité pour le malade, elle est, chez l'auteur de l'*Ancienne médecine*, le critère de la réalité pour le médecin. » C'est probablement en raison de cette 'distance' que Jouanna ne fait référence à Protagoras que dans cette note, et très rapidement, et non dans l'introduction générale qu'il donne au traité

²⁰ 120.3–14. Jouanna ; 1.572–574 Littré. Trad. Jouanna.

²¹ Schiefky 2005, 77 traduit de façon plus générale : « things that can be understood by lay people », mais note à propos du chapitre 1 que le verbe γινώσκω signifie usuellement dans la *Collection hippocratique* 'recognize' à propos d'une maladie, d'un abcès, d'une fracture, etc. (2005, 134–135).

²² Jouanna 1990, 174 (suite de la note complémentaire 8).

médical. Il reprend d'ailleurs, à ce sujet, l'opinion d'André-Jean Festugière, qui était déjà hostile au rapprochement. Schiefsky suit à la fois Festugière et Jouanna sur ce point : « Festugière rightly denies the presence of Protagorean relativism in the present passage or anywhere in VM », ²³ S'il est vrai, estime Schiefsky, que « μέτρον refers to a criterion or tool of judgment » dans la formule de « Protagoras » « as it does in VM 9 », « this is hardly sufficient to establish the influence of Protagoras on VM (or vice-versa) ». ²⁴ De plus, ajoute Schiefsky, « What can be said with confidence is that VM's position bears no resemblance to the kind of relativism attributed to Protagoras ».

On ne peut cependant nier, me semble-t-il, qu'il y ait, en plus de l'emploi du mot μέτρον au sens de critère, qui est justement noté par Schiefsky, une ressemblance indéniable, non pas entre le texte médical et Protagoras, mais entre le texte médical et la formule de Protagoras *telle qu'elle est interprétée* par Socrate ²⁵ et Théétète dans le *Théétète* : c'est l'emploi du mot αἴσθησις, au sens de la sensation du corps, la sensation que chaque individu éprouve à un moment donné, et sa définition comme μέτρον. Dans les deux cas en effet, la 'sensation' individuelle est définie comme 'mesure', et est le seul critère de ce qui est et de ce qui n'est pas. En ce sens, on peut comparer le texte de l'*Ancienne Médecine* et la *première interprétation* de la formule de Protagoras dans le *Théétète*.

Mais il ne faut pas négliger non plus la comparaison avec la reformulation de la thèse de Protagoras dans l'apologie que lui attribue Socrate. « The passage, with its reference to *metron*, is the closest parallel we have to Protagoras' own statement of the man-measure principle », a déjà noté A.T. Cole, mais il n'a pas véritablement argumenté son observation, sinon par une comparaison avec le cas de la visite du malade chez un oculiste, qui choisit les verres correcteurs en fonction des réponses du patient, ²⁶ ce qui lui a valu les critiques de Schiefsky : « That may be an apt illustration of the conception of τέχνη that Socrates offers Protagoras, but it fails utterly to capture the essential character of medicine as the author of VM conceives of

²³ Schiefsky 2005, 200, se référant aux pp. 59–60 de l'édition de Festugière 1948. Voir aussi Trédé 1992, 168. Schiefsky se sépare en revanche (avec raison) de l'interprétation de Festugière selon laquelle le passage désigne la façon dont « le corps se comporte *habituellement* sous l'effet de tel ou tel traitement ».

²⁴ Schiefsky 2005, 191.

²⁵ Interprétation que Maguire 1973, 120 qualifie non sans raison de « quite arbitrary identification ».

²⁶ Cole 1972, 28. L'exemple de l'oculiste qui fait des essais de verres correcteurs par la méthode de 'trial and error' est tout à fait anachronique et hors de situation (24–25).

it. According to the author, whether or not a certain treatment is beneficial for a patient depends on how it affects the patient's φύσις, not on how the patient *perceives* its effect», si bien que «Talk of relativism—Protagorean or otherwise—should simply be dropped from further discussion of VM». ²⁷ Le débat me semble ici biaisé par l'emploi du terme de 'relativisme' pour caractériser la position de Protagoras, et l'on peut proposer, me semble-t-il, une comparaison plus précise entre les deux textes.

L'apologie de Protagoras et le c. 2 de l'*Ancienne Médecine* (cité plus haut, p. 119) présentent un grand nombre de points communs. Le point de vue évoqué est dans chacun des cas celui de l'individu qui n'a pas de compétence: «l'un d'entre nous» ou «le malade», chez le Protagoras de l'apologie, «le profane», «le simple particulier», dans l'*Ancienne Médecine*. Cet individu a néanmoins des affects (παθήματα, chez le médecin, ἃ ἂν πάσχη chez «Protagoras», *Tht.* 167 A 8), qui correspondent à la réalité (avec des emplois prégnants du verbe 'être' dans les deux textes: «Protagoras» y insiste contre Socrate, et Jouanna l'observe fort bien à propos de τοῦ ἐόντος au c. 2 chez le médecin). Dans les deux textes, le sage (ou le médecin) ne doit pas parler d'autre chose ni partir d'autre chose; il ne doit notamment pas critiquer cette réalité (οὐ γὰρ περὶ ἄλλων τινῶν οὔτε ζητεῖν οὔτε λέγειν προσήκει, chez le médecin, οὐδὲ κατηγορητέον ὡς ὁ μὲν κάμνων ἀμαθὴς ὅτι τοιαῦτα δοξάζει chez «Protagoras», 167 A 1–2). Dans les deux textes aussi, néanmoins, il y a bien un spécialiste qui sait transformer la réalité de telle façon qu'elle soit désormais utile et bénéfique pour le profane ou le malade.

L'exemple de l'amertume, que prend de façon allusive «Protagoras», est fréquent dans la *Collection hippocratique*. L'amertume, dans le traité *De l'Ancienne Médecine*, est l'une des saveurs qui sont dans le corps: «Il y a dans l'homme du salé, de l'amer, du doux, de l'acide, de l'acérbe, du fade, et mille autres saveurs» (ἐνὶ γὰρ ἑνὶ ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ ἀλμυρὸν καὶ πικρὸν καὶ γλυκὺ καὶ ὀξύ καὶ στρυφνὸν καὶ πλαδαρὸν καὶ ἄλλα μυρία, *VM* 14.4, 136 Jouanna, 1.602 Littré). ²⁸ Dans certains cas, il peut y avoir accumulation d'amertume: «Quand une certaine amertume se répand, celle que nous appelons la bile jaune, quelles nausées, quelles fièvres brûlantes, quelles faiblesses s'emparent des malades!» (ὅταν πικρότης τις ἀποχυθῇ, ἣν δὴ χολὴν ξανθὴν καλέομεν, οἶαι ἄσαι καὶ καύματα καὶ ἀδυναμίαι κατέχουσιν, *VM* 19.5, 144 Jouanna, 1.618 Littré). C'est au malade de savoir si sa bouche est amère, et c'est au médecin de comprendre quelle humeur et quel processus est la cause de cette amertume,

²⁷ Schiefsky 2005, 191–192 et 48.

²⁸ Traduction Jouanna modifiée.

c'est à lui de nommer cette amertume 'bile jaune', de savoir pour quelle raison il faut que la bouche de son malade soit amère. Mais c'est bien le malade qui sait que sa bouche est amère.

Quittons ici le traité de l'*Ancienne Médecine* : « Parfois, le malade vomit de la pituite²⁹ acide, d'autrefois [*sic*] salée ; après avoir vomi, il a la bouche amère » (ένιοτε δὲ ἐμέει λάπην ὀξεῖην, ένιοτε δὲ καὶ ἀλμυρὴν, καὶ ὁκόταν ἀπεμέσῃ, πικρὸν τὸ στόμα δοκεῖ αὐτῷ εἶναι, *Affections internes* 47, 7.282–283, texte et traduction Littré). Littré, d'une façon très remarquable, gomme ici la spécificité du texte, qu'on peut traduire plus exactement : « Il lui semble que sa bouche est amère », « il trouve que sa bouche est amère ». Est-ce qu'elle ne l'est pas en réalité, est-ce que ce n'est qu'une impression ? Non bien sûr, elle est effectivement amère, mais le médecin note ici qu'il part de l'avis du patient, alors que les descriptions médicales habituelles vont directement au fait : « la bouche est, ou devient amère », ce qui explique la simplification de Littré. Dans le cas de femmes qui vont avoir un cancer, un médecin note, en mêlant notation objective et subjective : « Au moment où vont naître des cancers, la bouche tout d'abord *devient amère*, tout ce qu'elles mangent *leur semble amer* » (μελλόντων δὲ καρκίνων ἔσεσθαι, πρότερον τὰ στόματα ἐκπικραίνονται, καὶ ὃ τι ἂν φάγωσι πάντα δοκεῖσι πικρὰ εἶναι, *Maladies des femmes* 2.132, 8.282–283 Littré).

Le Protagoras de Platon définit ensuite le rôle du médecin par la capacité à μεταβάλλειν, « effectuer un changement », à la suite duquel le patient trouvera à nouveau les aliments doux, et non plus amers. De fait, comme l'a déjà observé Diès, « il n'y a qu'à parcourir Littré pour percevoir le rôle que jouait la μεταβολή et l'ἀντιμεταβολή dans la pratique et la littérature médicales ». ³⁰ Dans le traité de l'*Ancienne Médecine*, le médecin évoque avec précision les changements des humeurs. Ce sont des changements dus à la cuisson (la digestion), et affectant la texture : « subir la coction, se transformer, devenir ténu ou plus épais pour aboutir à une forme d'humeur en passant par de nombreuses formes variées » (πέσσεσθαι δὲ καὶ μεταβάλλειν καὶ λεπτύνεσθαι τε καὶ παχύνεσθαι ἐς χυμῶν εἶδος διὰ πολλῶν εἰδέων καὶ παντοίων, *VM* 19.6, 145 Jouanna, 1.618 Littré). Ce sont aussi des changements affectant la saveur, et cela permet de comprendre qu'une humeur se transforme alors en une autre

²⁹ Ou plutôt « une sorte d'écume qui se forme à la surface du vin aigri ou la pellicule grasseuse ou visqueuse qui surnage dans une marinade d'olives », selon la définition d'Erotien qu'évoque Jouanna 1974, 140 n. 1.

³⁰ Dans son édition du *Théétète* (1926), Introduction, 135. Il évoque notamment le *Régime des maladies aiguës* ; ce point a fait l'objet, depuis, d'études nombreuses, en particulier de Jouanna 1980a, par exemple.

humeur, puisque humeur et saveur ne font qu'un : « En ce qui concerne les qualités (δυναμίων), il convient d'examiner à propos de chacune des humeurs (χυμῶν) prises en elles-mêmes quelle action elle est capable d'exercer sur l'homme (...), et, à propos de leurs relations entre elles, quel degré de parenté elles entretiennent. Je veux dire en substance ceci : si une humeur, étant douce, se transforme en une autre espèce (εἰ γλυκὺς χυμὸς ἑὼν μεταβάλλει ἐς ἄλλο εἶδος), non par mélange, mais en quittant d'elle-même son état, quelle humeur deviendra-t-elle d'abord ? Sera-t-elle une humeur amère, ou salée, ou acerbe, ou acide ? A mon avis, acide. » (*VM* 24.1, 153 Jouanna, 1.634 Littré). Le modèle épistémologique de cette transformation du doux en piquant ou en acide, est probablement, comme on l'a observé, la transformation du 'vin doux' en vinaigre. Ce passage fait allusion à un troisième mode de transformation, le 'mélange', qui a été traité auparavant, à propos des flux qui sont à l'origine des « évacuations salées, aqueuses et âcres » : « Il convient, naturellement, de considérer que ces éléments sont la cause, dans chaque cas, de l'affection, puisque leur présence détermine nécessairement son mode d'être, et que leur changement en une autre crase (μεταβαλλόντων δ' ἐς ἄλλην κρήσιν) détermine nécessairement leur cessation » (*VM* 19.3, 144 Jouanna, 1.616 Littré, trad. Jouanna modifiée). Dans ces trois cas, il est vrai, la transformation de l'humeur n'est pas attribuée au médecin. Mais son action est signalée explicitement après le passage, que j'ai déjà cité (p. 121), où est mentionnée la bile jaune : « Une fois qu'ils se délivrent de cette humeur— parfois même à la suite d'une purgation soit spontanée, soit provoquée par un remède purgatif (ἢ ὑπὸ φαρμάκου), ... » (*VM* 19.5, 144 Jouanna, 1.618 Littré).³¹ Et il suffit d'évoquer des recommandations qui se trouvent dans d'autres traités pour comprendre que les médecins s'estimaient capables, grâce à leur art, de contrecarrer l'accumulation d'une humeur ou d'une saveur nocives. Pour ne prendre qu'un exemple, dans le traité des *Affections*, c. 15, « S'il n'y a pas de fièvre, mais que la bouche soit amère, le corps pesant, l'appétit nul, on donnera un médicament évacuant (...); cela provient de la bile, qui s'est fixée dans les veines et les articulations » (6.222–223 traduction Littré).³² La bouche

³¹ Cf. la note de Jouanna ad loc. : « Les médecins hippocratiques employaient des évacuants qui, selon eux, attiraient électivement la bile (jaune). Comparer *Nature de l'homme*, c. 5, Jouanna 176, 12–13 (Littré 6. 42–43) : καὶ ἦν διδοῖς φάρμακον ὃ τι χολὴν ἄγει, ἐμεῖται σοι χολή ».

³² Littré rapproche avec raison *Aphorismes* 4.17 (4.506 Littré), et Caroline Magdelaine, dans sa thèse de doctorat inédite, ad loc., compare *Maladies* 2.40 (171 Jouanna, 7.56 Littré) : « L'amertume de la bouche permet de déterminer que [la bile] se situe plutôt vers le haut du corps (...); si la bouche n'est pas amère, mais qu'il y a des coliques, il faut évacuer par le bas, car c'est signe que la bile occupe la partie inférieure du corps ».

du malade est effectivement amère, et il ne mange plus (ajoutons : parce que les aliments lui paraissent amers, et ils le sont effectivement pour lui) ; le médecin ne conteste pas cet état de fait éprouvé par la sensation du corps du malade, il l'explique, pour lui-même et pour le malade, par la présence de la bile, et « le médecin fait la modification par ses drogues » (φαρμάκοις μεταβάλλει, *Tht.* 167 A 5), pour reprendre l'expression de « Protagoras », il donne des évacuants pour faire disparaître, avec l'excès de bile, l'amertume. En vertu de son art, qui repose, semble-t-il, uniquement sur les résultats obtenus, sur l'utilité (rappelons qu'il n'y a aucun diplôme de médecine dans l'antiquité, et que le médecin doit effectivement prouver sans cesse sa compétence par son efficacité), le médecin modifie à la fois la perception du malade et la réalité de son état pour rétablir médicalement l'harmonie des saveurs.

La médecine hippocratique des saveurs et des humeurs donne un exemple de cette compatibilité si difficile à comprendre entre relativisme subjectiviste et efficacité médicale, et le dialogue de Platon fournit un arrière-plan philosophique aux observations médicales.³³

La difficulté est de savoir si cette compatibilité qui est défendue au nom de Protagoras représente effectivement la doctrine de Protagoras, ou une version revue et corrigée, non pas par Protagoras, mais par d'autres, ou par le platonisme, et, si l'on pense que c'est une version revue et corrigée, où commence et en quoi consiste la partie corrigée ? Dans le *Théétète*, Socrate insiste à plusieurs reprises, après l'apologie, sur le fait que ce discours (sans distinguer entre différentes parties de ce discours) représente une réécriture, la façon dont lui-même et ses interlocuteurs sont venus au secours du sophiste, et non pas les paroles que le sophiste aurait prononcées (168 C 2–5, ὑπεγράψαμεν 171 E 1, 179 D 2–3) : il s'agit donc indubitablement d'une élaboration présentée comme postérieure à la mort de Protagoras. Est-elle fidèle ou non ? Le Socrate platonicien dit que, dans cette élaboration, Protagoras a « concédé que pour la question du meilleur et du pire, certains l'emportent, lesquels, a-t-il concédé aussi, sont des savants » (συνεχώρησεν, 169 D 6–8), et il ajoute que cette concession, ce sont lui-même, Socrate, et ses interlocuteurs qui l'ont faite en « venant à son secours » (βοηθοῦντες ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ συνεχώρησαμεν, 169 E 1). Est-ce que cela implique « que la fin au moins de l'exposé de la doctrine de Protagoras (167 b–d) sur le thème 'qui sont les

³³ « The doctor or the sophist (...) restores men to the condition of proper measures; they are then capable of exercising their own capacity to gauge and interpret experience, guided by the informed experience of others », Farrar 1988, 72.

savants ?' est une élaboration propre à Socrate (ou à Platon) et non l'écho ou la citation d'un propos de Protagoras lui-même », comme le pense Michel Narcy ad loc. et de nombreux autres lecteurs ?³⁴ Il semble cependant difficile d'isoler à partir de ce passage une partie de l'apologie : le discours tout entier est organisé sur l'idée qu'on peut à la fois défendre la formule de Protagoras et soutenir qu'il y a des sages ou des savants. Si l'on supprime l'un des deux termes, on rend toute l'apologie inutile ou frauduleuse. C'est peut-être le Socrate de Platon qui transforme ici délibérément ce qui était au cœur de la thèse de Protagoras en 'concession' pour rendre bien visible le point d'où part sa réfutation, selon une méthode qu'on rencontre aussi dans le *Gorgias*, avec les mêmes ambiguïtés.

Plus loin, pour compliquer encore les choses, Socrate ajoute une autre interprétation : il y a des partisans de Protagoras, dit-il, « qui ne vont pas tout à fait jusqu'au bout de la thèse de Protagoras » (ἄσοι γε δὴ μὴ παντάπασιν τὸν Πρωταγόρου λόγον λέγουσιν 172 B 7–8), et qui soutiennent pourtant une thèse très proche de l'apologie, voire, selon certains, identique à la partie utilitariste de l'apologie, ce qui conduirait à nouveau à retirer au Protagoras historique toute cette partie utilitariste.³⁵ Il semble cependant que le passage (172 A 1–B 6) se sépare nettement, sur un point important, de l'apologie : il y est déclaré que la différence d'utilité entre les avis de tel ou tel individu ou entre les décisions de telle ou telle cité implique une différence, et donc une supériorité, « par rapport à la vérité » (πρὸς ἀλήθειαν, A 8), une concession capitale que l'apologie ne fait pas.³⁶ Ce que Platon suggère seulement, donc, c'est qu'il y avait diverses façons, plus ou moins fidèles, de soutenir sur la sagesse, l'art ou le savoir, une thèse proche de celle de Protagoras à propos de

³⁴ En particulier Maguire 1973, qui est plus sceptique encore dans son deuxième article (1977), 109 n. 21 : « I am no longer so inclined (...) to accept even the core-section of the "Apology" as authentically Protagorean » ; le point de vue objectiviste de Platon y est, estime-t-il, dominant.

³⁵ Thèse de Cole, 1966, notamment 110, et, à nouveau, 1972, 27 (à propos de 167 C : « This conception obviously contradicts the man-measure principle (...) ; and it is said by Socrates himself (172a–b) to correspond, not with the views of Protagoras, but with a modified or 'incomplete' version of those views »). Cole (1966, 113 n. 12) fait remonter à H. Jackson, *Journal of Philology* 13 (1885) 249, la définition de ces « incomplete Protagoreans », qui représentent Socrate lui-même selon lui (250 n. 1), comme me le fait remarquer M. van Raalte. Sur l'assimilation au 'pragmatisme' du début du vingtième siècle, cf. Burnyeat 1998, 41–42 et Chappell, 2004, 106.

³⁶ Sauf peut-être, il est vrai, dans une phrase corrompue (*infra* n. 37). Cf. sur ce changement 'dramatique' de perspective, Burnyeat 1998, 47 : « La proposition selon laquelle certains sont plus sages que d'autres est maintenant non pas l'élément central d'une défense du relativisme de Protagoras, mais l'aboutissement honteux de son autoréfutation ».

la compatibilité entre la valeur de connaissance attribuée à la sensation et à l'opinion d'un côté, et la possession d'une compétence efficace de l'autre, et, en ce qui concerne la médecine, il me semble que nous en avons la preuve.

Au total, l'*Ancienne Médecine* est plus nettement comparable avec les reformulations du *Théétète* (à la fois la première, socratique, et la seconde, celle de l'apologie) qu'avec la formule originale de Protagoras, et l'on est conduit à penser qu'à la fois la reformulation du *Théétète*, l'apologie de Protagoras et le traité médical appartiennent à un contexte intellectuel postérieur au Protagoras historique.

L'évocation de la médecine humorale est une comparaison dans le *Théétète*. Mais comment passer de l'efficacité médicale à l'efficacité politique ? Le texte le suggère assez clairement : par le passage du corps à l'âme, même si les médecins, eux aussi, ont l'âme dans le champ de leur compétence, dans la mesure où se mêlent chez les malades sensation du corps et opinion sur la nature des aliments (l'exemple médical permet d'ailleurs à Platon de passer aisément de la sensation à l'opinion). La suite de 'l'apologie' de Protagoras montre que selon Socrate, Protagoras appliquait à 'l'âme' la conduite des médecins à l'égard du 'corps'—entendu au sens large qu'on trouve de fait dans la *Collection hippocratique* (et, second point de comparaison, qui n'est pas développé, celle des paysans à l'égard des plantes) :

Mais, à mon avis, les gens qui se font une opinion (δοξάζοντας β) à partir des dispositions d'une âme en mauvais état (πονηράς codd.), c'est une âme en bon état (χρηστή BT) qui leur fait concevoir des opinions en parenté avec elle-même (ἐαυτῆς BTW) et bien différentes des précédentes, des opinions à propos desquelles certains parlent alors, en raison de leur inexpérience, de représentations qui sont vraies, et dont je dis, moi, qu'elles sont meilleures que les autres, mais en rien plus vraies. Et les sages, je suis bien loin de dire que ce sont les grenouilles : pour le corps, ce sont les médecins, et pour la culture, ce sont les paysans ! Car eux aussi, je l'affirme, quand une de leurs plantations est malade, font naître en elle, au lieu de perceptions pernicieuses, des perceptions (...) ³⁷ bonnes et salutaires. Et, bien sûr, les orateurs sages et

³⁷ Le texte des manuscrits (αἰσθήσεις τε καὶ ἀληθείς) semble impossible pour la syntaxe (cf. Maguire 1973, 125 n. 20 : « The τε καὶ are misplaced, or we require a noun parallel with αἰσθήσεις instead of the adjective ἀληθείς », avec renvoi à Cornford 1935, 71 n. 3) ; les traductions par « and true too » (McDowell 1973, 40), ou, pour éviter la difficulté, « and (if you like) 'true' perceptions » (Chappell 2004, 104) paraissent donc exclues. D'où les corrections : il faut exclure ἀληθείας « et des vérités » (Schleiermacher suivi par Nestle (ap. Maguire 1973, 125 n. 20 ; « surely not ἀληθείας », Maguire), car Protagoras semblerait se contredire lui-même, ou du moins adopter le langage de l'homme inexpérimenté) ; πᾶσας Richards (ap. Maguire 1973, 125 n. 20) ou ἕξεις (Diès) respectent la cohérence de la pensée, mais sont plus loin des manuscrits. Renahan (ap. Maguire, 126 n. 20) suggère que les mots ont été ajoutés par insertion d'une variante marginale

bons font que les cités estiment juste ce qui est bon pour elles au lieu de ce qui est pernicieux. En effet, tout ce qu'une cité estime juste et beau, cela l'est aussi pour elle tant qu'elle le considère comme tel, mais le sage fait qu'au lieu de chaque chose qui est pernicieuse pour les habitants, soit et apparaisse quelque chose de bon. C'est d'après le même raisonnement que le sophiste aussi, s'il est capable d'éduquer ses élèves de cette façon, est sage et mérite un gros salaire de la part de ses élèves. Et ainsi, les uns sont plus sages que les autres, mais personne n'a d'opinions fausses, et toi, que tu le veuilles ou non, il te faut supporter d'être mesuré. A ces conditions, ma formule, en effet, est préservée.³⁸ (Platon, *Théétète* 167 B 1–D 5)

L'utilisation du modèle médical en politique est attestée dans les textes conservés bien avant Platon et Aristote, qui en sont les principaux témoins. Pindare compare le roi Arcésilas de Cyrène, s'il fait preuve de clémence, à un « médecin » qui soignera par la douceur (*Pyth.* 4.270–271). Eschyle met en scène un Agamemnon qui, lui aussi, accompagne de douceur les remèdes violents du fer et du feu (*Agamemnon* 848–850). Comme le note encore, après d'autres, Jouanna, à qui j'emprunte cette analyse,³⁹ ce modèle était utilisé réellement dans les débats politiques athéniens, à en juger par le témoignage de Thucydide sur Nicias, qui invite le prytane à être le 'médecin' de la cité qui a pris une mauvaise décision et à obéir à l'aphorisme hippocratique bien connu d'*Epidémies* 1.5 selon lequel il convient « d'être utile ou du moins, de ne pas nuire » ὡφελῆειν ἢ μὴ βλάπτειν, cf. Thuc. 6.14 ὃς ἂν τὴν πατρίδα ὡφελήσῃ ὥς πλείστα ἢ ἐκὼν εἶναι μὴδὲν βλάψῃ. Jouanna établit un lien entre l'histoire du modèle médical en politique et l'évolution historique de la médecine à l'époque classique. L'invention de la médecine diététique, ou du moins sa théorisation explicite, est, à en juger par les nombreux traités hippocratiques sur le régime dans la *Collection hippocratique*, mais aussi par le livre III de la *République* de Platon, ressentie comme une importante découverte par les médecins de l'époque classique : elle a remis en cause le modèle dominant, allopathique, du traitement par le contraire, et aussi les méthodes anciennes, que Platon, dans la *République* du moins (405 C 7–410 A 6), regrette, par le fer (saignées) et le feu (cautérisation). Dans l'ancien modèle, guérir, c'était « puisqu'un grand changement s'est produit dans le

(erronée) à τε καὶ ἀγαθούς (C 2–3). On pourrait peut-être cependant à la rigueur adopter la solution d'un « postponement of τε », de type exceptionnel (Denniston 1954, 517 IV), solution proposée par Babut 1982, 59 n. 44 : les nouvelles perceptions sont bonnes, salutaires et (aussi) vraies (que les autres).

³⁸ Traduction personnelle.

³⁹ Jouanna 1980, 257 et 264 ; voir aussi Jouanna 1978, 1980a.

corps, (...) y opposer un grand changement en sens inverse avec vigueur», selon l'expression d'un médecin diététicien adversaire d'une application brutale de cette méthode (μεγάλης μεταβολῆς γενομένης τῷ σώματι, μέγα τι κάρτα καὶ ἀντιμεταβάλλειν, *Régime des maladies aiguës* 26, 47.11–13 Joly, 2.278 Littré, trad. Jouanna); à ce modèle, les nouveaux médecins opposent le changement graduel, «une thérapeutique du moindre changement», selon l'expression de Jouanna.⁴⁰ Les théories politiques peuvent donc, selon le cas, utiliser en un sens ou en un autre le modèle médical pour définir l'efficacité en politique: pour le changement, à la façon ancienne (brutal, seul remède, dans le cadre d'une thérapeutique par les contraires, qu'on peut seulement alléger par des calmants), pour le changement progressif (celui que recommande la médecine diététique), contre le changement (conçu comme toujours dangereux dans le régime).⁴¹ Le débat entre Nicias et Alcibiade au livre VI de Thucydide est un bel exemple, avant Platon et Aristote, de ces jeux rhétoriques. Les 'Sophistes' sont-ils concernés par ces jeux? Jouanna ne fait intervenir Protagoras dans son étude que dans une note finale, après une suggestion de Brunschwig: «on peut sans doute faire remonter jusqu'à Protagoras l'application du modèle médical au problème du changement des lois; cf. *Théétète*, 166d–167d, où le sage, dans les institutions de la cité, doit, comme le médecin, dans la constitution du corps, opérer un changement vers le mieux».⁴²

Cette observation finale peut être précisée. La comparaison, dans le *Théétète*, est moins entre la constitution du corps et les institutions de la cité, qu'entre le corps du malade et l'âme des citoyens, qui sont les deux domaines respectifs de l'action du médecin et du sophiste. C'est à travers cette distinction d'ailleurs que le problème du relativisme s'étend de la perception à l'opinion.⁴³ D'autre part, comme on l'a vu, la comparaison renvoie à la médecine des 'saveurs' et des 'humeurs', c'est-à-dire à la médecine qui devient à l'époque la médecine humorale, avec la définition progressive, entre autres sérosités variées, du 'phlegme' et de la 'bile jaune' à côté du 'sang', voire de la 'bile noire'. Cette médecine humorale comprend, mais dépasse aussi la médecine diététique et est un autre aspect jugé novateur de la médecine grecque classique. Les mêmes mots qui désignent saveurs et humeurs, χυμός et χυλός en particulier, désignent d'ailleurs aussi le suc des

⁴⁰ Jouanna 1980b, 265.

⁴¹ Par exemple, Platon, *Lois* 797 D 9–798 D 6.

⁴² Jouanna 1980b, 266 n. 21.

⁴³ Sur cette extension, cf. par ex. Burnyeat 1998, 38–39.

plantes, et l'on peut comprendre ainsi que Protagoras se réfère aussi bien à l'agriculture, pour laquelle malheureusement, nous manquons de textes. L'efficacité en politique vient d'une action sur l'âme comparable à celle de la médecine humorale sur le 'corps' (et l'âme) : de même que le médecin modifie par ses drogues un mauvais état humoral du corps, lié à l'amertume de la sensation (et aux opinions afférentes), pour le remplacer par un bon état, lié à la douceur, de même le sophiste modifie par ses paroles un mauvais état de l'âme de ses auditeurs pour le remplacer par un bon état, d'où naissent des opinions utiles et salutaires pour la cité. On peut donc conserver le texte le mieux attesté à 167 B 1–2 : ἀλλ' οἶμαι πονηρὰς ψυχῆς ἔξει δοξάζοντας συγγενῇ ἑαυτῆς χρηστὴ ἐποίησε δοξάσαι ἕτερα τοιαῦτα, « A mon avis, les gens qui se font une opinion (δοξάζοντας B)⁴⁴ à partir des dispositions d'une âme en mauvais état (πονηρὰς codd.), c'est une âme en bon état (χρηστὴ BT)⁴⁵ qui leur fait concevoir des opinions du même genre, en parenté avec elle-même (ἑαυτῆς BTW) et bien différentes des précédentes ».

La transformation médicale joue ou bien sur le changement graduel de régime, ou bien sur des méthodes plus radicales comme les lavements, les évacuations et les saignées, sans qu'il y ait opposition entre les deux méthodes, et pour finir, vérifie la formule par laquelle Burnyeat résume la thèse de Protagoras sur la compétence : x est compétent pour a si et seulement si il semble à a qu'il est mieux grâce à x .⁴⁶ Comment le langage du sophiste et de l'orateur est-il efficace, lui ? La même formule vaut-elle ?

On peut, me semble-t-il, proposer de voir un exemple de cette efficacité des paroles sur l'âme en matière politique dans le grand passage qui ouvre ce que nous avons appelé ailleurs⁴⁷ la 'première manche' de l'*epideixis* du *Protagoras*, c'est-à-dire le mythe de Protagoras et le commentaire qui le suit (où Protagoras « en apparence retrouve, mais en fait établit les formules de son principe et de sa loi »⁴⁸ sur l'universelle répartition de la pudeur et de la justice parmi les hommes), 320 C 8–328 D 2. Comme Burnyeat le suggère

⁴⁴ Sur l'emploi absolu du verbe, cf. par exemple 187 A 8, 188 A 7, 189 A 6. Narcy 1995 comprend de la même façon le texte δοξάζοντα, mais il a aussi été interprété parfois comme un neutre pluriel.

⁴⁵ « La leçon χρηστὴ est à écarter, car dans le contexte c'est toujours le σοφός qui provoque le changement des opinions, régulièrement exprimé par le verbe ποιεῖν ou ἐμποιεῖν (cf. 166 D 7, 167 A 6, C 1–2, C 2–4, et 5–6) », estime Babut 1982, 58 n. 43 ; mais le retour au texte transmis par les manuscrits est à mon avis nécessaire pour comprendre la pensée attribuée ici à Protagoras par Platon.

⁴⁶ Burnyeat 1998, 42.

⁴⁷ Cf. Trédé & Demont 1993, 26–30 et Demont 1994b.

⁴⁸ Bodin 1975, 31.

immédiatement après la formule que je viens de citer⁴⁹ et comme Narcy le fait dans les dernières pages de son introduction au *Théétète*, je voudrais donc me risquer maintenant à utiliser le *Protagoras* à l'appui de l'apologie de Protagoras du *Théétète*, sans nier, bien sûr, la probable intervention de Platon et du platonisme dans la présentation de Protagoras dans le *Protagoras*.⁵⁰

Proposons une remarque préliminaire : avant le mythe et le *logos* de Protagoras, la comparaison entre la médecine (et notamment la médecine diététique, celle qui concerne les aliments) et l'activité du sophiste est l'un des thèmes majeurs de l'introduction de ce dialogue. Il faudrait, dit notamment Socrate au jeune Hippocrates, pour apprécier les promesses de Protagoras, « être versé dans la médecine de l'âme » (313 E 2), car ce que risque l'élève de Protagoras, c'est justement de changer d'âme au contact du sophiste, ce qui engage son bonheur et son malheur. Platon place ici donc l'élève de Protagoras dans la situation où son Protagoras, dans le *Théétète*, place les citoyens auxquels s'adresse l'orateur qu'il a formé. Les deux niveaux d'efficacité que j'évoquais en commençant, l'efficacité de Protagoras sur ses élèves et l'efficacité politique, sont en rapport étroit de ressemblance : il s'agit pour Protagoras de modifier l'état de l'âme de son disciple comme un médecin modifie l'état du corps, il s'agira ensuite à lui-même ou à son élève de modifier l'âme des citoyens de la même façon.

En fait, par la grâce de Platon, au lieu de s'adresser au jeune Hippocrates, Protagoras, dans le *Protagoras*, s'adresse à Socrate. Examinons donc d'abord la relation entre Protagoras et Socrate qui est mise en scène. Comment se comporte-t-il avec Socrate ? Il est très frappant de voir que Protagoras ne contredit pas l'affirmation de Socrate sur l'attitude des Athéniens à l'égard de la politique, bien que cette affirmation paraisse contredire sa thèse à lui sur la possibilité d'enseigner la vertu. Au contraire, il l'approuve et la

⁴⁹ Burnyeat 1998, 43 : « Il n'y a pas d'objection à ce que presque n'importe qui puisse être trouvé convaincant ou source de progrès par quelqu'un dans une matière ou une autre. En premier lieu, c'est une affaire entendue depuis le *Protagoras* de Platon que Protagoras soutient que la vertu est enseignée par tout le monde à tout le monde. » Notons qu'en médecine, cela vaut aussi : selon l'auteur de *L'Ancienne Médecine* (VM 3, cf. p. 118) les progrès dans l'efficacité ont été d'abord le fait de ceux qui ont inventé la préparation des céréales, et il en reste encore beaucoup à faire.

⁵⁰ Cf. notamment Maguire 1977 sur le glissement (« obvious shift ») platonicien « from an amoral managerial skill (...) to the transvaluation of 'virtue' itself at the end » (106), passage effectué « in fact, in Protagoras's myth », par l'intermédiaire des « embryonic moral virtues in man » de « pudeur » (*aidôs*) et de « justice » (*dikê*) (108 et 111 n. 109), alors que le *logos* ultérieur (qui serait plus authentique) ne fait référence qu'aux lois et à l'éducation. Le mythe serait donc principalement platonicien. Mais il reconnaît lui-même que sa distinction est peut-être « too sharp » (108).

justifie même, en montrant qu'elle repose sur ce qu'on peut attendre selon la vraisemblance, au moyen de son mythe et du commentaire qu'il en donne. Louis Bodin, en particulier, a rappelé à quel point l'appel à l'*εἰκός* était important dans tout le passage.⁵¹ Cet argument du « ce que tu penses, c'est bien normal » (322 E 2, 323 A 2, 323 C 3, 324 C 5) repose sur un mythe (c'est bien normal étant donné le mythe), et ensuite sur l'appel à une conviction intime des Athéniens que le mythe a fait comprendre (c'est bien normal car les Athéniens [dont Socrate fait partie] pensent que tout le monde participe à la vertu politique), et, à ces divers titres, l'argument entre dans ce qu'Aristote appellera le vraisemblable relatif ou apparent, sur lequel, selon Aristote, Protagoras était particulièrement apte à jouer dans ses enthymèmes (*Rhétorique* 2.24, 1402 a 3–28).⁵² Ainsi, on pourrait appliquer à la méthode suivie par Protagoras à l'égard de Socrate dans cette partie du *Protagoras* la conclusion que le sophiste donne dans l'apologie que Platon lui prête dans le *Théétète* (167 D 3–4) : il faut bien que Socrate accepte d'être mesure ! Car « personne n'a d'opinions fausses » : les Athéniens ont raison de se comporter comme ils le font et Socrate a raison de soulever l'objection qu'il soulève. Mais, si on lit bien le *Théétète*, peut-être Socrate et les Athéniens ont-ils raison comme les malades de la bile ont raison de sentir que les aliments sont amers.

Protagoras introduit en effet ensuite un second raisonnement, destiné à modifier la perception que Socrate a de la réalité. Pour cela, il part à nouveau de l'opinion de Socrate, cette fois sur ce qu'est le fait de châtier ou de punir : « Si tu veux bien réfléchir à la signification des châtiments qu'on inflige aux coupables (ἐννοῆσαι τὸ κολλάζειν, ὦ Σώκρατες, τοὺς ἀδικούντας τί ποτε δύνανται), tu y verras aussitôt le signe que les gens considèrent que la vertu peut s'acquérir » (*Prot.* 324 A 3–6), mot à mot : « si tu veux te mettre dans l'esprit ce que peut impliquer le fait de châtier les coupables, ... ». Le procédé que Platon attribue à Protagoras a été observé par Bodin : Socrate était parti de la constatation que les Athéniens « se moquent » (καταγελῶσι καὶ θορυβοῦσιν, 319 C 4–5) de qui parle sur un sujet technique sans compétence et le chassent de la tribune : Protagoras ajoute à ces verbes « ils s'irritent » (ἢ καταγελῶσιν ἢ χλευαίνουσιν, 323 A 9–B 1), puis « ils avertissent » (νουθετοῦσιν, B 1), ensuite, dans une reprise négative concernant ce qui relève de la nature, apparaissent en plus les verbes 'punir' et 'instruire' (οὐδεὶς θυμοῦται οὐδέ νουθετεῖ οὐδὲ

⁵¹ Bodin 56–57 et 73–75, sur les οὐ γὰρ θαυμάζειν, οὐδὲν θαυμαστόν et les εἰκότως.

⁵² La distinction entre vraisemblable relatif et vraisemblable absolument n'est pas opérante du point de vue du Protagoras du *Théétète*, puisqu'une opinion de l'âme d'un citoyen à un moment donné est une réalité à ses yeux.

διδάσκει οὐδὲ κολλάζει, 323 D 1–2). ‘Punir’ est répété, pour arriver à la phrase que j’ai citée, et mener à l’analyse de la punition comme instruction, et, ensuite, « les deux notions de ‘punir’ et d’enseigner’ tendent à se confondre ». ⁵³ Ainsi, conclut Bodin, Protagoras, par des glissements de sens comparables à ceux que relève Platon dans le *Phèdre*, espère-t-il « faire passer d’un état moins bon à un état meilleur » la pensée de son interlocuteur. ⁵⁴ Une fois donc introduite, d’une façon quasi-subreptice, à la fin du mythe, la notion d’enseignement, il ne reste plus à Protagoras qu’à amplifier son analyse par un ‘raisonnement’, et non plus par un ‘mythe’, dit-il (324 D 6–7). On saisit là un cas d’école, en quelque sorte, de la façon dont Protagoras atteignait l’efficacité sur les âmes, en l’occurrence l’âme de Socrate, sur un sujet essentiel de l’analyse politique. A la fin du récit, d’ailleurs, Socrate, selon l’expression de Platon, complètement « sous le charme », a « bien du mal » à « rassembler ses esprits » (μόγισ πως ἐμαυτὸν ὥσπερ εἰ συναγείρας, 328 D 7).

Si l’on passe de la relation entre Protagoras et Socrate au contenu argumentatif du discours de Protagoras, il est clair que le raisonnement décrit l’efficacité politique collective, qui résulte d’un système à la fois coercitif et éducatif continûment appliqué de l’enfance à l’âge adulte au sein de la cité d’Athènes. La notion de régime n’est pas employée par Platon ici. En revanche, le rôle du langage est très clairement affirmé. Comme l’observe Narcy, « il est important que Protagoras fixe à l’acquisition du langage le seuil initial de cet apprentissage de la justice ». ⁵⁵ Il ajoute encore, par opposition à certaines interprétations du mythe de Protagoras : « à partir de quoi il est facile de conclure à sa nature conventionnelle : il faut être comme un enfant qui ne connaît pas encore d’autre langue que la sienne pour s’imaginer que la justice du *Protagoras* est moins relative que celle du *Théétète* ». Je ne ferai qu’une réserve à l’égard de son analyse. La justice y est d’emblée pour Protagoras, avant Aristote, une habitude autant qu’un langage, et non pas seulement « une question de correction linguistique », car l’apprentissage du langage est en même temps celui d’une conduite : « A propos de chaque geste, de chaque parole—καὶ ἔργον καὶ λόγον—, ils lui apprennent, lui expliquent : Ceci est juste, cela injuste ; ceci beau, cela laid ; ceci pieux, cela impie ; fais—ποίει—ceci, ne fais pas—μὴ ποίει—cela » (325 D 2–5). Le caractère collectif de l’éducation et des corrections, par le biais de maîtres divers, permet de comprendre le caractère collectif des opinions sur la justice et des pratiques

⁵³ Bodin 1975, 98. Cet aspect est peu explicité dans l’étude de Saunders 1981.

⁵⁴ Bodin 1975, 99.

⁵⁵ Narcy 1995, 119.

de justice que l'enfant, puis le jeune homme, puis le citoyens acquièrent ou consolident. L'image médicale apparaît une fois dans le texte : celui qui résiste à ce qu'on peut appeler ce régime est déclaré « incurable » (*ἀνίατον*, 325 A 8) et, comme tel, exilé de la cité ou mis à mort. Ici encore, on ne dira pas qu'un tel individu est dans l'erreur parce qu'il ne respecte pas la justice, mais qu'il doit être soigné, redressé, corrigé, ou sinon, être chassé ou mis à mort : la maladie qui n'est pas guérie mène à la mort (la perspective de la mort revient quatre fois en quelques lignes, 325 B 1–C 2), et d'ailleurs, dans la *Collection hippocratique*, certains médecins enseignent qu'il faut savoir reconnaître, le cas échéant, les cas incurables, et qu'on peut ou qu'on doit refuser de les soigner.⁵⁶ Cette efficacité collective est graduée en fonction de l'âge : successivement, interviennent l'éducation dans la maison (nourrice, mère, pédagogue et père, dans cet ordre), le maître de lecture et de musique (c'est à ce propos que l'image de la fabrication de l'âme est la plus apparente, 326 B 1–4), puis le maître de sport, et enfin les lois de la cité, qu'il faut prendre au sens large : il s'agit de toutes les institutions selon lesquelles le citoyen, d'après la formule fameuse que reprendra Aristote, peut « exercer une magistrature ou obéir à un magistrat » (*καὶ ἄρχειν καὶ ἄρχεσθαι*, 326 D 7 ; Arist. *Pol.* 1259 b 33, 1277 b 20, 1332 b 12–13). Par rapport à cet ensemble, l'efficacité que revendique Protagoras est présentée, non sans fausse modestie,⁵⁷ comme un simple complément, liée à « une supériorité », qui, « si légère soit-elle », mérite d'être reconnue (*καὶν εἰ ὀλίγον ἔστιν τις ὅστις διαφέρει ἡμῶν ...*, 328 A 8–B 1), fût-ce au prix, fixé par le disciple,⁵⁸ d'un salaire élevé. Cette supériorité apparaît, de façon implicite, comme ce qui fournit la capacité promise initialement en matière d'efficacité politique. Au total, ce passage du *Protagoras* propose donc une version qu'on pourrait qualifier d'optimiste, une version simplifiée, sans problème, de l'efficacité politique : les changements évoqués par le *Théétète* pour transformer l'âme des interlocuteurs-citoyens du sophiste ou de ses élèves s'effectuent de façon cohérente avec les institutions et l'éducation, et dans la même direction, vers l'apprentissage de la justice et de la vertu propres à une cité, apprentissage

⁵⁶ Sur cette question du refus de soin dans les cas incurables, cf. notamment *De l'Art*, 3,2, 8 et 13 ; 226, 232–234 et 241 Jouanna, 6,2–4, 12–16 et 26 Littré.

⁵⁷ Cf. le *διαφερόντως* ironiquement accolé par Platon (328 B 2).

⁵⁸ Selon une application quelque peu ironique de la formule de l'homme mesure des *χρήματα* (qui inverse des proverbes usuels, cf. Demont 1993). La formule de Protagoras peut aussi critiquer une autre maxime célèbre (*οὐδέ τις οἶδεν / πῇ μέλλει σχίσσειν χρήματος ἀρχομένου*, Solon 13.65–66 West ; *σκοπέειν δὲ χρὴ παντός χρήματος τὴν τελευτὴν καὶ ἀποβήσεται*, Hérodote 1.32.9) : il ne faut renvoyer à aucune divinité l'appréciation des affaires humaines.

dont une maîtrise supérieure donnera à ses détenteurs l'efficacité en matière politique sur leurs concitoyens moins savants. On peut compléter ce tableau idyllique en imaginant ici encore que la formule de Burnyeat est valide : x est compétent pour a si et seulement si il semble à a qu'il est mieux grâce à x , c'est-à-dire que l'élève de Protagoras ne sera réélu stratège année après année que s'il apparaît compétent à ses concitoyens relativement à l'amélioration de la cité.

Cette analyse permet, du point de vue du sophiste, de renforcer la leçon faite par Protagoras à Socrate. La leçon apparaît ainsi comme une sorte de clef de voûte proposée par le vieux père de la sophistique à l'éducation de Socrate l'Athénien, ou du moins elle remplirait ce rôle, si Socrate ne parvenait pas à résister à cette transformation de son âme—résistance dont en fait il trouve en lui-même les ressources.

Plus ardu, mais néanmoins similaire, est le rôle dévolu au sophiste et à ses élèves dans le *Théétète*, puisqu'ils doivent savoir modifier la nature de ce que les citoyens considèrent comme juste, au lieu de simplement prolonger et mener à son point culminant l'éducation de toute une vie. A ce sujet, je voudrais présenter une dernière observation.

Revenons à l'apologie de « Protagoras » et à la comparaison entre médecine et politique. Comparaison n'est pas raison, et il y a une différence importante, bien que masquée, entre le domaine médical et le domaine politique. Burnyeat la décrit à partir de la question de la compatibilité entre deux formules : des choses meilleures apparaissent à quelqu'un, et : des choses apparaissent meilleures à quelqu'un.⁵⁹ Si je comprends bien (je modifie quelque peu sa formulation), dans le cas du médecin, les deux formules sont valides. Le médecin est capable, par la modification de l'état humoral, de faire que le malade ressentira de la douceur au lieu de ressentir de l'amertume dans la bouche, donc pour le malade, il y a perception de l'amélioration. En revanche, dans le cas de la politique, l'homme politique efficace est capable de faire que des décisions salutaires (meilleures) apparaissent justes, mais non pas qu'elles apparaissent meilleures, ce qui implique une « concession tacite » selon laquelle ces décisions sont objectivement meilleures. Il propose alors une autre solution, une « double application de la doctrine de la mesure : les choses qui semblent et par conséquent sont meilleures (...) viennent à sembler justes et par conséquent sont justes dans cette cité aussi longtemps que la nouvelle convention est en vigueur », une solution qui, semble-t-il,

⁵⁹ Burnyeat 1998, 43–45.

lui apparaît grevée d'un « manque de précision » peut-être « délibéré », pour faire ressortir que Protagoras a fait une concession, à moins qu'il ne s'agisse d'une marque d'authenticité protagoréenne.⁶⁰

Dans la phrase clef, la traduction que j'ai adoptée, et qui est usuelle : « Le sage fait qu'au lieu de chaque chose qui est pernicieuse pour les habitants, soit et apparaisse quelque chose de bon » (*Tht.* 167 C 6–7), fait apparaître de façon quasiment explicite la « concession tacite » évoquée par Burnyeat, et dissimule le fait que l'emploi répété de l'adjectif *χρηστός* par « Protagoras » (166 A 2, 167 B 2, C 1, C 7 deux fois) est évidemment en rapport avec la formule de Protagoras : son domaine de référence vise précisément à éviter toute allure trop platonicienne. Cette concession, une fois transposée en vocabulaire platonicien, se heurte à une objection qui est clairement formulée par Michel Narcy : « Le juste seul est affaire d'opinion (...). Cela contredit le principe-même qu'est en train d'illustrer Protagoras, et, donnant matière à des compétences qui échappent à l'opinion, anticipe la réfutation prochaine de Socrate ».⁶¹ Aussi propose-t-il une autre façon de la comprendre. Alors que ce qui est sous-entendu dans la traduction ci-dessus, c'est que le sage « fait apparaître [comme juste] au lieu de chaque chose etc. », on pourrait éviter ce sous-entendu en traduisant : « Le savant, c'est celui qui, au lieu de pénible, chaque fois qu'un de leurs décrets l'est pour eux, le fait être, c'est-à-dire paraître, bénéfique ». Il commente ainsi cette traduction⁶² : « Pour Protagoras, le bon ou l'utile, aussi bien que le juste, sont affaire d'opinion : d'où il suit qu'on peut faire changer d'opinion aussi bien sur l'un que sur l'autre. L'art de l'orateur est donc de faire trouver juste à la cité ce qu'elle trouve bon ou utile, mais non juste, ou de lui faire trouver bon ce qu'elle trouve pénible, mais juste : en résumé, de lui permettre d'avoir des opinions compatibles entre elles. Cela suppose seulement de donner pour référent à *ἐκάστων* (167 C 7) *αὐτά* (167 C 6) ». Il me semble cependant que le 'juste' n'est pas, pour « Protagoras », sur le même plan que le 'bon' ou le 'pernicieux', ce que la notion de 'compatibilité' risque de ne pas faire apparaître.

On pourrait examiner cette difficulté d'un autre point de vue. En médecine, une fois l'équilibre humoral rétabli dans le corps, la perception de l'amertume disparaît, et celle de la douceur peut revenir avec la santé, alors

⁶⁰ Burnyeat 1998, 45. Babut 1982 (voir notamment 60–61) estime que, comme « aucun critère objectif ne peut découler logiquement d'un principe subjectiviste », Platon parodie dans l'Apologie l'art avec lequel Protagoras dissimulait par des « artifices de langage » le glissement du sens épistémologique au sens pratique du mot *σοφός*.

⁶¹ Narcy 1995, 337.

⁶² Narcy *per litteras*.

que, en politique, les citoyens en bloc sont déclarés continuer d'avoir la perception de la 'justice': la modification de leurs âmes et, donc, de leurs opinions fait qu'il ne mettent plus les mêmes décisions sous ce nom, mais c'est toujours de 'justice' qu'ils délibèrent. Cela permet à nouveau d'établir une cohérence entre le portrait du *Théétète* et celui du *Protagoras*. Dans le *Protagoras*, la condition de base du 'salut' humain est (selon le mythe, au niveau 'divin') la présence en tout homme de 'justice' et 'respect', et (selon le raisonnement, au niveau civique) la croyance selon laquelle tout homme doit dire qu'il respecte la justice: « C'est un aveu unanime: tous les hommes doivent se proclamer justes, qu'ils le soient ou non » (323 B 6–7). « Qu'ils le soient ou non »: cela ne se réfère pas, d'un point de vue protagoréen, à une essence de la justice, mais à telle ou telle justice de telle ou telle cité, inculquée tout au long de la vie à tel ou tel citoyen. On est dans la même perspective qu'Hérodote commentant le νόμος βασιλεύς de Pindare au moyen de son fameux apologue concernant Darius (3.38.4, Pind. fr. 169 Snell): les lois et coutumes constituent l'être de l'homme (il faudrait être fou comme Cambyse pour s'en moquer), mais elles sont propres à chaque communauté humaine. Pour Hérodote cependant, certaines—notamment celles des Spartiates et celles des Athéniens—sont supérieures à d'autres, car elles apportent plus d'efficacité, de prospérité et de réussite. Protagoras, ou « Protagoras », lui, estime possible de faire évoluer, par l'art politique, une cité, d'une situation moins favorable à une situation plus favorable, en modifiant subrepticement sa conception de la loi. L'efficacité en politique suppose l'existence de cette norme dans chaque cité, dont la variabilité trouverait peut-être un équivalent, du point de vue de la médecine antique, dans la 'crase', dans le tempérament propre à tel ou tel individu.⁶³

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⁶³ Je remercie vivement Michel Narcy, Pierre Pontier et les éditeurs de cette volume de leur relecture attentive et de leurs remarques.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

FANGS, FEATHERS, & FAIRNESS: PROTAGORAS ON THE ORIGINS OF RIGHT AND WRONG

Adam Beresford

The story about Prometheus and Epimetheus that Plato puts into the mouth of Protagoras presents us with a disguised version of a rationalist and naturalist account of the origin of animals and the early development of human beings. It combines a general account of animal biology with a theory about the origin of our ethical practices, and it is the joining together of those two different areas of thought that gives the allegory a special philosophical importance. My aim here is to explore that combination.¹

1. THE RATIONALIST THEORY BEHIND THE STORY

First let's consider the various reasons for seeing the story as a version of Ionian rationalism. That means, above all, assuming that all gods in the story have a strictly symbolic role, as we would expect given Protagoras' well-attested, aggressive agnosticism.²

- (1) Protagoras says that he can answer Socrates' question with a story (*muthos*) or a straight account (*logos*), and then says that he prefers the former (*Prot.* 320 C 2–4, 6–7). He must mean that there exists a

¹ For treatments of the story see Nussbaum 2001, 100–106; C.C.W. Taylor, 2007; Denyer 2008, commentary on 320 C 3–328 D 2; Guthrie 1969, 63–68; 255–260; Heinemann 1945, 115–116; Adkins 1973; Dodds 1973, 9–23; Kerferd, 1949–1950, 20–26; Levi 1940; A.E. Taylor 1927, 241–247. My treatment is in close sympathy with Nussbaum, Guthrie, and C.C.W. Taylor, in being a rejection of Plato's criticisms of Protagorean meta-ethics (whereas the great majority of commentators largely support those criticisms). My special interest is in exploring connections between the story and Darwinian ideas.

² Protagoras claimed to have no idea whether any gods of any sort existed at all (DL 9.51, DK 80 B 4). The fact that he stated this in public made him a bold opponent of theism by the standards of the day. A more common strategy for people who rejected (providential) theism was to claim to believe in gods *of some kind*, but not the kind that take an interest in human affairs. Aristotle and Epicurus, for instance, both adopted that less daring strategy (as did Spinoza and Hume in approximately similar circumstances).

non-mythical version of the claims that he is about to make. It seems extremely likely that there would be no gods in that version. That impression is then reinforced by his choice of two gods with manifestly allegorical names, Prometheus and Epimetheus, as well as by his use of the well-established symbolism of Athena and Hephaestus.³ Further, from the moment the story ends (323 A 4) and he passes back into *logos*, Protagoras makes no further mention of any gods in any part of his speech or anywhere else in the entire dialogue.

- (2) Various later sources give us a reliable picture of rationalist, Presocratic theories about the origin of life and of human society.⁴ A passage preserved by Diodorus Siculus (1.7.1–6; 1.8.1–9), and independently by John Tzetzes, serves as well as any other text as an indication of what a non-allegorical version of Protagoras' story might have looked like. Although we cannot be certain of Diodorus' source, it seems probable that his text derives from Democritus—Protagoras' compatriot, fellow-humanist, and near contemporary⁵—and it offers us the standard rationalist theory of origins, widespread in the fifth century enlightenment.⁶ Diodorus' cosmogony asserts that after the

³ Greek listeners easily grasp that Athena stands for the arts, Hephaestus for metallurgy, etc. These gods' only role in the story (321 D 1–323 A 4) is to supply those things (indirectly, when Prometheus steals them and gives them to humanity). Zeus likewise almost certainly has a definite allegorical meaning, but this is a little less easy to discern (see below).

⁴ For a useful collection of these sources, see Campbell 2003, 331–333.

⁵ Some sources claim that Protagoras was Democritus' pupil. See DL 9.50, DK 80 A 1, II.253.21: δῆλ' οὖν ὁ Πρωταγόρας Δημοκρίτου; likewise Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 1.494, DK 80 A 2, II.255.17–18; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1.14.64.4, DK 70 A 1, II.231.3–4; Athen. 8.50.14, DK 68 A 9, II.85.28–32; Eus. *Praep. evang.* 10.14.16. The testimony is late and the chronology a little awkward (Democritus was apparently the younger of the two by twenty odd years), but the claim apparently goes back at least to Epicurus, and very probably to Aristotle. Cp. DL 9.53.6 (DK 80 A 1, II.254.10–13): καὶ πρῶτος τὴν καλουμένην τύλιν, ἐφ' ἧς τὰ φορτία βαστάζουσιν, εὗρεν, ὡς φησιν Ἀριστοτέλης ἐν τῷ Περὶ παιδείας (fr. 63 Rose): φορμοφόρος γὰρ ἦν, ὡς καὶ Ἐπίκουρος πού φησι. καὶ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον ἦρθη πρὸς Δημοκρίτου ξύλα δεδεκώς ὀφθαλμοί. The last part of this, asserting the connection with Democritus, is part of what Epicurus reported. Cp. Athenaeus' reference to the same text (see above), DK 68 A 9, II.85.28–30: ἐν δὲ τῇ αὐτῇ ἐπιστολῇ ὁ Ἐπίκουρος καὶ Πρωταγόραν φησὶ τὸν σοφιστὴν ἐκ φορμοφόρου καὶ ξυλοφόρου πρῶτον μὲν γενέσθαι γραφέα Δημοκρίτου. (...). Diogenes' text is then very naturally read as stating that Aristotle made the same claim. The reference to Epicurus (ὡς καὶ Ἐπίκουρος πού φησι) is parenthetical, and the καὶ means that Epicurus 'also' (i.e., *as well as Aristotle*) made the claim that starts at φορμοφόρος γὰρ ἦν. Even supposing these claims had no historical basis at all (perhaps Epicurus' letters and the Περὶ παιδείας were both spurious), they at least imply that Protagoras' surviving writings were widely viewed as Democritean.

⁶ DK treat the passage in Diodorus and the closely related passage in John Tzetzes' commentary on Hesiod (*Op.* 42 bis, κρύψαντες γὰρ ἔχουσι) as deriving from Democritus (DK 68

formation of the world through purely physical and material necessity, animals formed spontaneously within bubbling, womb-like cavities just below the surface of the ground, when the flat and muddy earth was acted upon by the heat of the sun (1.7.1–6). It describes the subsequent gradual evolution of humanity through their discovery of fire and technology, and the development of agriculture and language, and proposes that they began to cooperate and to form communities as a means of defending themselves against wild animals (1.8.1–9). The account is thus strikingly similar to Protagoras' story both in outline and in detail, even to the point of several verbal echoes that leave no reasonable doubt that there is a close link, a textual relationship of some kind, between Diodorus' source and the material that is being quoted, imitated, or paraphrased by Plato in the *Protagoras*.⁷ Many of the details

B 5, II.134.2–138.13). Tzetzes and Diodorus agree closely and seem to be using the same single written source independently. (Consider, e.g., Diodorus 1.7.2, DK 68 B 5.1, II.135.13: ... ποιῆσαι τὴν γῆν πηλώδη καὶ παντελῶς ἀπαλὴν.) Tzetzes (*Scholia ad Hes.* 3.58.13–14 Gaisford; DK 68 B 5.3, II.137.27–28) has: ὑποστήναι τὴν γῆν πηλώδη καὶ παντελῶς ἀπαλὴν. Diodorus 1.8.7, DK 68 B 5.1, II.136.9–10: εἷς τε τὰ σπήλαια καταφεύγειν ἐν τῷ χειμῶνι καὶ τῶν καρπῶν τοὺς φυλάττεσθαι δυναμένους ἀποτίθεσθαι. Tzetzes (3.59.7–9 Gaisford, DK 68 B 5.3, II.138.2–3) has: τὰ σπήλαια ὑπεδύοντο, καὶ τοὺς τῶν καρπῶν δυναμένους φυλάττεσθαι ... συναπετίθεντο. But that degree of textual correspondence is rare. Typically Tzetzes has the *gist* but not the exact wording of Diodorus, exactly as if they are working from a common source. He also offers several details and stylistic oddities not found in Diodorus and apparently from the source. We can be confident of this because there is a third, shorter paraphrase of the same text, attributed to Hermippus (DK 68 B 5.2, II.136.31–137.23) and Hermippus and Tzetzes several times agree in some quirky detail against Diodorus. The several clear connections with Plato's text (see next note) point to an early source. Democritus seems the best candidate by far. See also Guthrie 1957, 29–46, and 1965, 471–474. I agree broadly with Guthrie: "This evolutionary view of culture ... is to be found, identical in outline and in many of the details, in Aeschylus, Euripides, Critias, Protagoras, the Hippocratic *On Ancient Medicine*, and the evidently fifth-century source of the pre-history in Diodorus 1.8. It is therefore difficult to trace its origin to any particular thinker. The substance of the chapter in Diodorus has been thought to have originated with Democritus, but must have been current earlier." (1965, 473). It is of interest here that Tzetzes presents his version of the cosmogony as an explanation of the Prometheus myth in Hesiod's *Works & Days*. Thus, he not only gives us part of the *logos* behind Protagoras' story, but also explicitly states that it is a non-allegorical version of a Prometheus myth (Tzetzes *Scholia ad Hes.* 3.58.10–11: ταῦτα μὲν τὰ μυθικά· καὶ δὴ σαφέστερον, καὶ κατὰ ἀλληγορίαν μοι μάνθανε, καὶ ἱστορικωτέρως καὶ ἀληθῶς κατὰ Ἑλλήνας. φασιν Ἑλληνες ...); oddly, when Tzetzes says "and now here's the allegory" what he means is "and now here is what the myth means, taken allegorically". It is tempting to think that the *Protagoras* somehow caused Tzetzes to connect this Presocratic cosmogony with Prometheus. It serves far better as an explanation of Protagoras' story than Hesiod's.

⁷ Some particular verbal echoes: (1) Diodorus (1.8.2) uses the unusual metaphor of warfare to refer to attacks by wild animals on human beings: καὶ πολεμουμένους μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων ἀλλήλοις βοηθεῖν [sc., the first generation of human beings]; cp. *Prot.* 322 B 4–5: πρὸς δὲ τὸν

of the Diodorean passage are also closely paralleled in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (5.772–1104),⁸ presumably because of Epicurus' heavy reliance on Democritus, and that means that we can use Lucretius as a secondary witness to some of the ideas that lie behind the allegory as well (and in some cases must do so, as he is our only surviving detailed source).

So these various witnesses show us that the Protagoras myth is closely connected with the then standard naturalist theory of origins, and for the purposes of this discussion we shall assume that its ideas, certainly in broad outline, perhaps in some of the details, may be attributed to the historical Protagoras.⁹ This charming, allegorized version of the theory (no trace of which survives in any of the non-Platonic sources) may very well have been Plato's own invention, given his fondness for composing myths. Or we might consider taking the dialogue at face value, historically speaking. The story is presented by Plato as an *epideixis*.¹⁰ Perhaps rather than simply inventing its form he is reporting an actual Protagorean *epideixis*—however exactly he came to know of it—so that what we have here is a matter of imitation and imaginative reconstruction, like the several other imitations in the corpus: his imitation of Lysias in the *Phaedrus*, of democratic oratory in the *Menexenus*, of Socrates' defence speech in the *Apology*, and more broadly of Socratic

τῶν θηρίων πόλεμον ἐνδεής [sc. ἡ δημιουργικὴ τέχνη]—πολιτικὴν γὰρ τέχνην οὐπὼ εἶχον, ἥς μέρος πολειμική. (With that final phrase Plato's text seems to me to literalize the opening metaphor, as if he were making fun of it.) (2) Diodorus (1.8.1) says of the first people: τοὺς δὲ ἐξ ἀρχῆς γεννηθέντας τῶν ἀνθρώπων ... σποράδην ἐπὶ τὰς νομάς ἐξιέναι; cp. *Prot.* 322 A 8–B 1: κατ' ἀρχῆς ἄνθρωποι ὥκουν σποράδην. (Note that σποράδην occurs nowhere else in Plato.) (3) In Diodorus (1.8.3) we find διαρροῦν τὰς λέξεις used of language development; cp. *Prot.* 322 A 5–6: ἔπειτα φωνὴν καὶ ὀνόματα ταχὺ διηρθρώσατο. (4) Diodorus (1.8.2) has ἀθροίζομένους ... διὰ τὸν φόβον, speaking of the first communities, formed out of fear of wild animals; cp. *Prot.* 322 B 1–6: ἀπώλλυντο οὖν ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων ... ἐζήτουν δὴ ἀθροίζεσθαι (5) Describing the foods of the first people, Diodorus (1.8.1) gives τῆς τε βοτάνης τὴν προσηνεστάτην καὶ τοὺς αὐτομάτους ἀπὸ τῶν δένδρων καρπούς; cp. Protagoras describing the foods of the animals (321 B 3–4): τοῖς μὲν ἐκ γῆς βοτάνην, ἄλλοις δὲ δένδρων καρπούς.

⁸ See Campbell 2003 for an excellent and very helpful commentary on the Lucretian material and survey of its Epicurean and Presocratic sources.

⁹ A work attributed to Protagoras, Περὶ τῆς ἐν ἀρχῇ καταστάσεως (DL 9.55, DK 80 B 8b, Il.267.9), usually taken to mean *On The Original Condition (of Humankind?)*, must have expressed some of these ideas. But it seems almost certain that this would not have been in the form of a myth, and therefore it could not be a direct model for our story. It has also been suggested—not without some plausibility—that this title may have arisen in the reports from mere guesswork made on the basis of the *Protagoras* myth itself.

¹⁰ Thus, at the end of Protagoras' myth and subsequent speech (328 D 3): Πρωταγόρας μὲν τοσαῦτα καὶ τοιαῦτα ἐπιδειξάμενος ἀπεπαύσατο τοῦ λόγου.

method in the early dialogues. On this view we might reasonably suppose that the story records Protagorean thought and style, with an accuracy in proportion to Plato's remarkable skill as an imitator and reporter of ideas, even if what we have is by no means an actual work of Protagoras, and even if we are unable to untangle the web of transmission from the real person to Plato's character.

So, leaving aside more speculative proposals, we shall assume here (a) that Plato has provided us with a pretty good portrait of the historical Protagoras, and (b) that his Protagoras is setting out, behind a veil of myth, a Presocratic theory about the non-divine, natural origins of life, humanity and morality, and (c) that Plato's educated readers would easily have connected the story with the views of Democritus in particular. The purpose of this allegorical disguise is not just to make the speech "more agreeable" (*χαριέστερον*) as Protagoras somewhat disingenuously claims, but also to conceal, or at least soften, the godlessness of the underlying theory.¹¹ Admittedly, the myth amounts to a flimsy disguise (all but the dimmest listeners will understand what Protagoras is saying) but that is only to be expected. His purpose is not to conceal his ideas entirely, but to pre-empt the charge of atheism, which the allegory does by a clever technicality: it co-opts the gods themselves to express this controversial new idea, that we do not need any gods either to explain our existence or to be the basis of right and wrong.

- (3) In the story, the gods 'mould' the animals 'inside the earth', from earth and fire and their compounds (320 D 2–3). These are subtle references

¹¹ Earlier in the dialogue (316 C 5–317 B 3) Protagoras alluded to the hostility directed at sophists (i.e., as he uses the term, public intellectuals and philosophers) because of their influence on the young, and said that earlier 'sophists' disguised their ideas (using poetry as a cover, for instance) to avoid such trouble. He is referring to the intolerance faced by humanists and agnostics like himself, because so many Greeks assumed, like the prosecutors of Anaxagoras, and later of Socrates, that atheists were corruptors of public morals. Thus, he gives a clear indication that, proud as he is of being a sophist, he might sometimes have reason to disguise his anti-theistic views. The reference to poetry hints at the use of myth for that purpose. (He even names Hesiod, the originator of the Prometheus and Epimetheus story, as one of the early 'sophists in disguise', 316 D 7.) Of course, Protagoras was an agnostic rather than an atheist; but as such he felt that ethics was an exclusively human concern (which is what I mean here by 'humanism') and that is a central and potentially offensive implication of the story. Plato himself was very hostile to humanists (in addition to merely disagreeing with them). Cp. *Leg.* 887 C 8–D 1: "It is impossible not to be intolerant of, not to hate, the people who are responsible for these claims [sc., that there are no gods, or that the gods do not concern themselves with human morality]". In 909 A 7–8 the Athenian (Plato's mouthpiece) declares that people who persist in making such claims should be put to death, even if they endorse morality fully. Protagoras certainly falls into this category of humanist; so do Aristotle, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell.

to the spontaneous moulding of the animals from the elements in those sun-baked bubbles in the primordial ooze. The same connection explains the choice of Epimetheus as the designer of the animals—a role that he is assigned uniquely here. The rationalist theory underlying the myth aims to remove the gods from the picture.¹² This was the “most fundamental and universal” tenet, as Guthrie put it, of the fifth century enlightenment: “the substitution of natural for divine causation everywhere”. And an important part of the theory (if we may rely on Epicurus) was the idea that since the animals that emerged from the mud were generated by mindless and purely natural forces, large numbers of them were bizarre, ill-formed monstrosities, unable to survive and reproduce. Those that did survive were lucky winners of nature’s lottery: amid the myriad failed experiments, a few animals happened to emerge with structures and features that enabled them to persist.¹³ This was, as it seems, an ingenious attempt to account for the obvious fitness and functionality of animals and their parts without recourse to gods or deliberate design. So in the allegorical version of the same theory Protagoras needs to find a god who can represent this absence of divine providence and thoughtful design. But how could any god stand for the absence of gods? He chooses Epimetheus, whose name expressly signifies *lack of forethought*: the careless and thoughtless god who is “not intelligent at all” (321 B 7: οὐ πάνυ τι σοφὸς ὢν) and who never notices a problem until it is too late. To underline the point, he remarks that Prometheus was originally assigned the task with his brother, but Epimetheus insisted on embellishing the animals *all on his own* (παραιτέται ... αὐτὸς νεῖμαι, 320 D 6). That is the story’s way of emphasizing the *total* absence of foresight and intelligent design from the formation of the animals. Epimetheus is the god who blunders and learns from his mistakes,¹⁴ and no god could more neatly personify

¹² Guthrie 1965, 354.

¹³ Cp. Lucr. 5.837–865 (*multaque tum tellus etiam portenta creare | conatast mira facie membrisque coorta | androgynem, interutrasque necutrum, utrimque remotum, | orba pedum partim, manuum viduata vicissim | ... | necququam, quoniam natura absterruit auctum | ... | multaque tum interiusse animantium saecula necessest | ...*). The idea that nature must have failed in these spontaneous productions far more often than it succeeded goes back at least to Empedocles (DK 31 B 57, B 59, B 61, I.333.9–11, 21–23, 334.22–25). Finding it again in Epicurus, we can be confident that it was part of the thinking of Democritus, and at least familiar to Protagoras, in between.

¹⁴ E.g., scholiasts on Hesiod (ed. Flach 1876) show us clearly that the name was understood as standing for trial and error or for learning from mistakes: (1) Ἐπιμηθέα δὲ λέγει τὴν

the unconscious, trial and error process described by Democritus.¹⁵ Of course, in the story this bungling, thoughtless god produces beautifully designed animals. But that is precisely the paradox behind the allegory: that even mindless, natural processes, even a *thoughtless* creator, can generate intricate and complex adaptations.¹⁶

- (4) Protagoras carefully and repeatedly stresses that *all* the features and powers handed out by Epimetheus aided each species *in its survival*. He sets up the striving for survival as the fundamental principle of the distribution. In Epicurus that detail forms a very important part of the wider argument against design. Existing animals have exactly those features that enable them to persist, originally assigned to them randomly by nature. There was nothing special or miraculous about the way they were given those features; no divine intelligence was involved. Nor should we on that account be surprised or amazed that they fit the animals to their environment so perfectly. After all, if they did not have those features, then those animals would not be here, and if nature was constantly experimenting in the earliest period of the earth's history, then such lucky accidents were pretty much bound to arise.¹⁷

ὑστεροβουλίαν καὶ τὸν μετὰ τὴν πράξιν ἐπισυναγόμενον νοῦν. Joannes Galenus, *Allegoriae in Hesiodi Theogoniam*, 332.26–27 Flach; (2) καλῶς δὲ ὁ μῦθος ἀδελφὸν τῷ Προμηθεὶ τὸν Ἐπιμηθέα παρίστανει. ἀληθῶς γὰρ ἡ ἀπὸ Προμηθέως ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὠφελούμενος οὐ περιπίπτει κακῶ ἢ ἀμαρτῶν ἀναγκάται πάλιν δι' ὑστεροβουλίας. διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ ἀμαρτίνουσιν τοῦτον ἔφη, παρὸς ἀμαρτάνοντός τινος ἐπέρχεται ἡ ὑστεροβουλία καὶ ἡ ἐκ ταύτης ὄνησις. Anonymi *Exegesis in Hesiodi Theogoniam ad Th.* 510, 403.8–14 Flach.

¹⁵ In that sense, it is equally the Darwinian view that biological evolution is Epimethean, not Promethean. That is to say, Darwin proposes that biological evolution proceeds mindlessly, thoughtlessly, stumbling upon good 'design' (i.e., successful adaptations) by making blind, unguided modifications and suffering the consequences, usually bad, occasionally good. This basic idea, that some *sufficiently large* number of blind trials will inevitably generate at least *some* lucky successes—eliminating the need for a conscious designer—is thus common to both ancient and modern biological naturalism, regardless of the considerable differences in the mechanisms of generation that they propose, and it is a central philosophical insight of both.

¹⁶ This is identical to Richard Dawkins' (1986) metaphor for natural selection, the '*blind watchmaker*'.

¹⁷ Lucretius emphasizes this experimentation not only in the formation of animals (5.790–792: *nova tum tellus ... | ... mortalia saecula creavit | multa modis multis varia ratione coorta*) leading to the extinction of most of them (see above, n. 13) but even in the formation of worlds, and it appears that the idea of constant random experiments of matter at *all levels of organisation* was a general and important Democritean principle. Thus, Democritus thought there were infinite worlds (DL 9.44, DK 68 A 1, II.84.10–11: δοκεῖ δ' αὐτῷ ... ἀπείρους τε εἶναι κόσμους καὶ γενητοὺς καὶ φθαρτοὺς), many of them not fit for life (DK 68 A 40, II.94.38–39: εἶναι δὲ ἐνίοους κόσμους ἐρήμους ζῶων καὶ φυτῶν καὶ παντὸς ὑγροῦ), the implication being that

- (5) Aristotle, in the *Parts of Animals*, appears to quote from the story. He criticizes certain unnamed philosophers—representatives of a distinct school of thought?—who claim that human beings are poorly constructed, because they come into the world ‘naked and without shoes and without weapons for self-defence’.¹⁸ It seems likely that Aristotle has the *Protagoras* in mind here, not least because it was evidently one of his favourite works,¹⁹ and it is obvious that he is treating this claim as part of the wider argument against teleology in nature.²⁰ He is right to see the story as implying that human beings are in some respects inferior to the other animals, but he may also have in mind a more complex Democritean argument that must have used similar terms. The fact that human beings are so helpless in their natural state, especially as infants, recurs in Epicurus as one of his less convincing arguments for the view that we have been rather carelessly put together.²¹ Contrary to Aristotle’s reading, which may be influenced by his knowledge of Democritus, our story does not seem to be making

the suitability of this world for life is a matter of chance, not of divine providence. For this important general principle, see also Lucr. 5.188–193: *ex infinito iam tempore percita plagis | ponderibusque suis consuerunt concita ferri | omnimodisque coire atque omnia pertemptare, | quaecumque inter se possent congressa creare, | ut non sit mirum si in talis disposituras | deciderunt (...)*. Cicero confirms that this idea comes from Democritus. Cp. *ND* 1.73: *quid est in physicis Epicuri non a Democrito? nam etsi quaedam commutavit, ... tamen pleraque dicit eadem, atomos, inane, imagines, infinitatem locorum innumerabilitatemque mundorum, eorum ortus, interitus, omnia fere quibus naturae ratio continetur*. See also Dennett 1995, 176–181 for this idea of the cosmic extension of Darwinian thinking.

¹⁸ 687 a 23–26: ἀλλ’ οἱ λέγοντες ὡς συνέστηκεν οὐ καλῶς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀλλὰ χεῖριστα τῶν ζώων (ἀνυπόδητόν τε γὰρ αὐτὸν εἶναι φασὶ καὶ γυμνὸν καὶ οὐκ ἔχοντα ὅπλον πρὸς τὴν ἀλκὴν) οὐκ ὀρθῶς λέγουσιν. Carbone (2002, 753–755) thinks that Aristotle is referring to the *Protagoras* itself, and that seems plausible. But note that οἱ λέγοντες suggests a school or group of thinkers. It is what we might expect if he were quoting the *Protagoras* while also aware that the idea really came from the Ionian materialists more generally.

¹⁹ The following is a selection of the texts in his ethical works that quote from, allude to, or are influenced by the *Protagoras*: *EN* 1114 a 23–24, 1116 b 4–6, 1144 b 28–30, 1145 b 22–27, 1147 b 14–15, *EE* 1229 a 14–15, 1230 a 7–8, 1246 b 34, *Pol.* 1283 a 20–21.

²⁰ The argument had a long life in this role. A version of it is quoted by Epictetus five hundred years later, *still* functioning as an argument against divine providence: (*Discourses* 1.16.2): Μὴ θαυμάζετ’ εἰ τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις ζώοις τὰ πρὸς τὸ σῶμα ἔτοιμα γέγονεν, οὐ μόνον τροφαὶ καὶ πόμα, ἀλλὰ καὶ κοίτη καὶ τὸ μὴ δεῖσθαι ὑποδημάτων, μὴ ὑποστρωμάτων, μὴ ἐσθῆτος, ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντων τούτων προσδεόμεθα.

²¹ Lucr. 5.222–225: *tum porro puer ... | ... nudus humi iacet, infans, indigus omni | vitali auxilio, cum primum ... | nixibus ex alvo matris natura profudit (...)*. The weakness of the argument is in the fact that helpless infants are cared for by their parents, and any theist (or biologist) could point out that parental care is part of the divine design (or the extended phenotype) of the animal. Countless animals’ offspring are unable to survive without their parents’ aid.

that claim. Protagoras does not mean that we are badly constructed *overall*, but rather that because of our lack of *bodily* strengths and endowments, we rely on our ingenuity and survive by our wits, just as the animals that lack strength rely on speed, and animals that lack speed rely on bulk.²²

So, let us proceed with this reading of the allegory. Our technical ingenuity is given to us, in the story, by Prometheus, and his gifts enable us to survive. That is to say that *our own intelligence* and foresight, our ability to think ahead, allows us to survive in the way we do, and occupy our ecological niche—the niche of the versatile, inventive, tool-making animal. This is once again strikingly close to Darwinian thinking, in that it casts intelligence itself as just another biological endowment, similar to the endowments of other animals and dispensed under exactly the same natural rules.

Two important philosophical ideas are implied by this view of things. First, Protagoras is saying that there is nothing special about humanity in the larger order. We are not the centrepiece of the cosmos, but just another animal muddling along with the rest of them. They have their ways of surviving, and we have ours. Other animals have not been created for our sake any more than we were created for the sake of other animals. Second, the story implies that our intelligence is something that we have because it is a mechanism of survival. *We think in order to live*. This reverses the Platonic and Aristotelian view that, ultimately, human beings *live in order to think*. For Plato and Aristotle, the workings of the mind, human or divine as the case may be, are primary and fundamental in the structure of the cosmos. For Aristotle the exercise of reason, which in its purest form is a kind of imitation of the mind of God, is the ultimate human biological function. It is thus the final cause of every other biological feature of the human animal.²³ For Plato the

²² Compare this part of the story with the following passage from the evolutionary biologist, Ernst Mayr: “The environment slowly shifted to a bush savanna. This deprived the australopithecines of their retreat to safety, for in a treeless savanna they were completely defenseless. They were threatened by lions, leopards, hyenas and wild dogs, all of whom could run faster than they. They had no weapons such as horns or powerful canines, nor the strength to wrestle with any of their potential enemies successfully. Inevitably most australopithecines perished [But] some populations survived by using their wits to invent successful defense mechanisms ...” (Mayr 2001, 244); “They could no longer escape carnivores by climbing trees, and so had to depend on their ingenuity.” (248).

²³ Aristotle thinks of the *psuchê* as ‘the thing for the sake of which’ living things are the way they are: providing the purpose of all its strivings (*De an.* 415 b 14–21). He also considers activity of the soul to be the human ‘function’ (i.e., *ergon*, *EN* 1098 a 7), which apparently means natural function, and identifies reason and thought as the ‘goal of our nature’

divine mind preceded, created, and sustains all the order of the cosmos.²⁴ Protagoras' story, or at any rate the theory behind it, proposes that the cosmos has a mindless and godless origin, and that human intelligence—which he surely thinks is the only kind there is—arose from material causes as a tool of survival of one particular animal in one particular world.

2. PROTAGOREAN ETHICAL NATURALISM: *NOMOS* AND *PHYSIS*

But the most important part of the story is its explanation of the development of morality (*Prot.* 322 A 3–323 A 3). Human beings, we are told, were able to use their technical ingenuity to provide themselves with food, but they could not form communities because they did not yet possess 'the art of being citizens' (*politikê technê*), which is to say that they did not yet possess the ethical dispositions that enable us to cooperate with other people, beyond their own families. So they were slaughtered by wild animals and the species was in danger of dying out, until Zeus gave them 'shame and a sense of right' (*aidôs* and *dikê*), thereby enabling them to cooperate and make common defence against their attackers. So morality (just like intelligence) is essentially a tool for survival, and that fact explains how it arose in a completely amoral, material universe.

Very well, but by what mechanism did it 'arise'? What does this part of the story mean *exactly*? It is often treated as a version of the social contract theory, and with fairly good reason. It resembles the versions of that theory presented elsewhere by Plato, and it seems likely that Plato himself assumes that it *is* such a theory, subject to the same (in his view) fatal weaknesses. We also think that some version of the social contract theory was favoured by other ancient ethical naturalists (by the Epicureans, for example) as the best available natural explanation of morality's origin. But the theory as stated by Calicles in the *Gorgias* (483 B 4–C 8) or Glaucon in the *Republic* (358 E 3–359 B 5) involves no discussion of human biology, and still less of the origin of other animals, because none is required. The contract theory has nothing directly to do with biology. Rather, it asserts precisely that morality is cultural,

(*Pol.* 1334 b 15). He also argues that philosophical contemplation is the finest and highest activity of the human soul (*EN* 1177 a 12–1178 a 8). It follows that he thinks that the human animal exists, from the point of view of our biological nature, *so as to exercise* the higher faculties of the mind.

²⁴ This is the view set out fully in *Timaeus*. It is also implied by the idea that the Form of the Good is the cause of everything in the universe (cp. *Resp.* 508 B 12–509 C 4). The same idea is stated more succinctly at *Phd.* 98 B 1–6, and *Leg.* 892 A 1–B 8.

not biological. It is the theory that human ethical standards arose from some kind of communal deliberation. People actually *grasped* at some point that they would do better for themselves by cooperating than by exploiting one another, and they *instituted* appropriate habits, cultural practices, and laws. If that is the idea behind this part of Protagoras' allegory, then it seems that the earlier, biological section is meant to show the boundary of human nature: where *phusis* ends and *nomos* takes over.

But that way of reading the story very much undermines the larger point that Protagoras is trying to make. He is trying to defend democratic practices, and he wants to show that it makes perfect sense for Athenians to assume that a sense of fairness and respect for the rights of others are universal features of humanity. Clearly it would be easier to defend that view by claiming that ethical qualities have some connection with human *phusis*, and far harder if what he means is that they are universal only through the action of *nomos*. It is a cliché of the philosophical discourse of the time that those things that are the result of *nomos* are *not* universal, but subject to change from place to place, and capable of being discarded if and when we wish.²⁵ So the story would have to somehow also explain why this particular *nomos*—the tendency of human beings within a community, other things being equal, to treat each other fairly—manages to behave like a product of *phusis* in being, as Protagoras claims, both universal and immutable. Perhaps that is what the story aims to do. Protagoras may mean that cooperation is so essential to our existence that people in all cultures invariably *figure out* its value and devise and transmit the necessary social norms, by the processes that he describes in the later part of the speech.

But we should also consider a different reading. We might try taking the two halves of the story together, and let the biological ideas of the first part extend into the ethical portion. If Protagoras is saying that human ethical dispositions are a partly *natural* endowment, given to us under the same principle as the natural endowments of other animals, then the resulting theory is a much stronger response to Socrates, and a much more plausible form of ethical naturalism than the crude contract theory.

²⁵ That 'throwing off' of moral conventions is vigorously advocated by Callicles (*Gorg.* 484 A 2–6): ἐὰν δέ γε οἶμαι φύσιν ἱκανὴν γένηται ἔχων ἀνὴρ, πάντα ταῦτα ἀποσεισάμενος καὶ διαρρήξας καὶ διαφυγὼν, καταπατήσας τὰ ἡμέτερα γράμματα καὶ μαγγανεύματα καὶ ἐπωδὰς καὶ νόμους τοὺς παρὰ φύσιν ἅπαντας, ἐπαναστάς ἀνεφάνη δεσπότης (...). Similarly, in the *Protagoras* itself Hippias describes *nomos* as "the tyrant of humankind" which often "violates our nature" (ὁ δὲ νόμος, τύραννος ὢν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, πολλὰ παρὰ τὴν φύσιν βιάζεται. 337 D 2–3). See especially Heinimann 1945.

How credible is it, then, that Protagoras sees morality as a part of, or tied to, human nature? At first glance this seems implausible, since right after the story Protagoras says that a common sense view (which, by implication, he shares) is that morality (that is to say, ethical ἀρετή) is not a product of *phusis* (οὐ φύσει ... εἶναι) but arises from instruction, training and effort.²⁶ That explains, he says, why we blame people for failing to acquire it and exercise it (323 C 8–D 6). After all, we do not blame people for defects that are a result of their nature. Nevertheless, there are several good reasons for thinking that this section of his argument is somewhat misleading as to his wider view, and that Protagoras does intend Zeus' gift to stand for a natural or partly natural endowment.

- (1) In the first place, Protagoras says elsewhere in the *logos* that ethical qualities do depend on our nature. He says, for instance, that some people have a nature that makes them exceptionally able to develop these dispositions, while others may have rather less ethical talent, so to speak.²⁷ He treats that idea as uncontroversial, and uses it to explain why some people grow up (ethically) better than others, even though the amount of ethical instruction we all receive is, according to him, roughly equal (327 C 4–328 B 1). But clearly, if our ethical dispositions depend on our individual nature, then they must also depend more broadly on our human nature.²⁸ Some swallows fly better than others, and some wolves hunt more successfully than others, and those differences may depend on differences in their natural talents; but the ability of the swallows to fly, and of the wolves to hunt, depends in general, and far more, on the universal biological endowments of swallows and wolves.

²⁶ 323 C 5–8: ὅτι δὲ αὐτὴν οὐ φύσει ἡγούνται εἶναι οὐδ' ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου, ἀλλὰ διδασκόν τε καὶ ἐξ ἐπιμελείας παραγίγνεσθαι ᾧ ἂν παραγίγνηται, τοῦτό σοι μετὰ τοῦτο πειράσομαι ἀποδείξαι.

²⁷ Cp. 327 B 7–C 1. The claim comes as part of a complex analogy. He proposes that in a world where flute playing was as crucial to our existence as morality is in the real world, teaching of the flute would be constant, public, and universal. In that case, only differences in innate talent would account for differences in adult players: ἀλλὰ ὅτου ἔτυχεν ὁ υἱὸς εὐφυσέτατος γενόμενος εἰς αὐλήσιν, οὗτος ἂν ἐλλόγιμος ἡύξηθη, ὅτου δὲ ἀφυσῆς, ἀκλεῆς· (...). The implied claim is that there are, in the real world, corresponding differences in *ethical* talent. Note, though, that this idea still has a strongly egalitarian flavour. Protagoras asserts that this talent is distributed unpredictably: a good father often has a bad son, and a bad father a good son. This suggests the Periclean (and un-Platonic) idea (see Thuc. 2.37.1) that one's parentage should have no bearing on political opportunity.

²⁸ For this important idea of *common* biological nature, as opposed to individual nature, cp. Hippocr. *Epid.* 1.3.10: τὰ δὲ περὶ τὰ νοσήματα, ἐξ ὧν διαγιγνώσκωμεν, μαθόντες ἐκ τῆς κοινῆς φύσιος ἀπάντων, καὶ τῆς ἰδίας ἐκάστου· (...).

- (2) It is true that Protagoras thinks that teaching and practice are vital to our ethical development (if we may assume the rough authenticity of the *logos* part of the speech). But that view is fully compatible with a belief in innate ethical tendencies, because his idea is apparently that the finished virtues are a product of instruction and training *acting upon* natural predispositions. Compare Aristotle's view, that virtues are neither purely natural nor purely cultural, but that "nature primes us to receive them, and habituation perfects them" (*EN* 1103 a 25–26). It is useful to note his exact language here: he says, just like Protagoras at 323 C 5, that ethical traits "do not arise in us by nature" (δῆλον ὅτι οὐδεμία τῶν ἠθικῶν ἀρετῶν φύσει ἡμῖν ἐγγίνεται, 1103 a 18–19) when what he clearly means is that they are not, as we would say, *purely* innate, or that they do not develop *all by themselves* like fingers and toes and kidneys. Elsewhere (*EN* 1144 b 4–6) he makes it clear that he thinks our ethical virtues are indeed, as we would say, *partly* innate: "Everyone thinks that all traits of character exist, in some sense, by nature (πᾶσι γὰρ δοκεῖ ἕκαστα τῶν ἠθικῶν ὑπάρχειν φύσει πως). Right from birth we have some inclination to fairness, moderation, bravery and so on". Protagoras' use of φύσει at 323 C 5 should be understood in the stronger, first sense: as his gloss (οὐδ' ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου) helps us to see, Protagoras means that ethical qualities do not develop *just* from our nature, i.e., "all by themselves";²⁹ he does not mean that they have no basis in our nature at all. That reading fits with the view attributed to him elsewhere: that "⟨moral⟩ instruction requires both nature and practice".³⁰ The same view is also stated clearly later in this dialogue, in his remarks on bravery, which he says arises "both from nature and from the proper nurturing of our souls" (351 B 1–2). In fact, Protagoras may have influenced Aristotle quite strongly here.³¹ Aristotle thinks that virtues substantially depend

²⁹ For another clear instance of this use of φύσει in connection with moral dispositions, cp. Plato *Meno* 89 A 5–6: οὐκοῦν εἰ ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχει, οὐκ ἂν εἶεν φύσει οἱ ἀγαθοί. Socrates has just argued (81 A 10–86 C 2) that 'opinions' (δόξαι) exist in our souls before birth and enable us to grasp things through mere prompting rather than detailed teaching. He makes it clear that he thinks this applies to ethical understanding (81 C 8–9, 98 A 4). These ethical δόξαι are obviously innate, in modern terms, and 'natural' even in ancient terms. So at 89 A 5–6 Socrates must just mean that moral goodness is not a *purely* natural (i.e., fully automatic) development. In his view, our innate 'opinions' need to be developed by philosophy (whereas Protagoras thinks they can be developed by mere socialization).

³⁰ DK 80 B 3, II.264.23–24 (*Anecdota Gr. Paris*. 1.171.3): ὁ Πρωταγόρας εἶπε... 'φύσεως καὶ ἀσκήσεως διδασκαλία δέεται'.

³¹ For the similarities between Aristotle and Protagoras here and on several other points, see Nussbaum 2001, 102–104; Guthrie 1969, 67.

on natural predispositions, and that ethical education is a matter of habituation (through reward and punishment, beginning in childhood) rather than a product of philosophical argument or instruction. He thinks that by the time we start moral philosophy we should already have acquired, through human nature, good upbringing, and good habits, an unreflective grasp of the basic moral facts (*EN* 1095 b 4–8). He also claims that there is no rational justification (no *logos*) of the ethical ‘starting points’ (*archai*) that derive from human character (*EN* 1151 a 17–18). The same view is very clearly implied here by Protagoras, who does not include philosophical instruction in his detailed account of moral education (325 C 5–328 B 3) and instead talks only of the ways that parents, teachers, culture and law *instil* and *encourage* morality, from earliest childhood, not by argument, but by habituation, by the training of our emotions, and even by the use or threat of force. Aristotle and Protagoras see moral education as a blunt instrument, and in that respect their view differs very starkly from the Platonic and Kantian idea that real morality only emerges with some sort of philosophical enlightenment or very precise method of rational justification.

There are two things to note about this ‘blunt instrument’ view of moral education. The first—whether or not Protagoras is thinking along these lines—is that it works best in tandem with a theory of innate dispositions, and probably requires such a theory. It is a profound mystery how these crude and non-rational forms of teaching (repetition, parental anger, peer pressure, spankings, reading the *Odyssey*, etc.) could possibly succeed in producing cognitively complex virtues in twelve year-olds, unless we suppose that human beings are predisposed to develop those virtues and that these simple forms of teaching are more strictly forms of *triggering*. In the same way, we develop our linguistic capabilities at lightning speed, merely by exposure to the jabbering of other speakers, even though the data we are exposed to is far from sufficient to enable us to deduce the complexities of grammar from scratch so quickly. One view is that we accomplish this feat because we possess an innate language organ: a hard-wired grammar and other prefabricated linguistic tools.³² We pick out the nouns and the verbs in our parents’ speech because we are born *expecting* to hear nouns and verbs. Likewise, in the ethical case, the success of blunt forms of training

³² See Pinker 2000, esp. 1–11 and 265–340, for an overview of some of the evidence. The issue remains controversial in some quarters.

suggests that innate dispositions are doing a very large chunk of the work.³³ Protagoras gives no clear indication that he has thought this through. But it is nonetheless a theoretical implication of the Protagorean portrait of education.³⁴

That portrait is also central to his defence of democracy (something that he certainly *has* thought through). Since moral education is a blunt instrument (for whatever reason) it follows that it is *widely available*: ordinary cultural practices and everyday modes of ethical thinking—messy and muddled as they may be—will be perfectly sufficient to turn us into good people, capable of taking full part in civic and ethical deliberation. In fact, Protagoras goes so far as to claim that *everyone* is a moral educator (an idea that clearly appalled Plato, and that he closely identified with the democratic view) exactly as every speaker of a language is also a completely competent, even if unwitting, teacher of that language (327 E 3–328 A 1). On his view, you do not need to do any philosophy to become morally competent, just as you do not need to study formal grammar before you can master a language, or Newton's laws before you can walk or throw a ball.

- (3) The fact that in the story Prometheus is unable to give us any ethical sense (321 D 3–5) suggests the same nativist reading. Prometheus explicitly represents human cleverness and cultural invention. So the prominent detail that Prometheus did *not* have the power to dispense morality suggests, according to the clear grammar of the allegory, that human ingenuity is not capable of devising (for example, by a conscious agreement) the moral dispositions that sustain social existence. If morality were a cultural artefact, a product of our cleverness alone, then

³³ For the idea that moral development resembles language acquisition, see Hauser 2006, 37–75 (and *passim*, since this a central idea of the book); Rawls 1999, 41, 430.

³⁴ Note that this point also addresses the old worry (shared by Plato) that such blunt education must give us the wrong *reasons* for acting ethically. E.g., Denyer 2008, on 324 B 5: “If I punish some kind of behaviour in order to turn people away from it, then I must certainly suppose that people can refrain from such behaviour, and that I can get them to refrain from it. But I need not suppose that anyone can make people virtuous—whether by education or by any other means. For I may suppose that virtue requires not only correct overt behaviour, but also correct motivation.” The objection seems to assume (as Plato himself does in his Gyges' ring story, *Resp.* 359 C 7–360 B 3) that the resulting motive is bound to be simply our *fear of the punishment*; but that need not be the case at all, if the punishment triggers innate dispositions or otherwise activates some fully ethical part of our character. And our belief in the efficacy of punishment may be precisely a belief in its ability to do just that. (Sometimes a bird will fling its nervous offspring out of the nest for their first flight. But of course that does not mean that it is the *push* that causes them to fly. Rather, they are pushed into using their wings.)

Prometheus would be just the right god to dish it out. As it is, Protagoras seems to say that our Promethean talents were not up to the task: some source other than human foresight was required. In the story, that other source is Zeus himself (322 C 1–3). But what does Zeus' gift stand for, then, if not for the social contract? Plausibly, the gift of our sense of right and wrong represents *another* natural endowment, this time of ethical instincts; something deeper in our psyche than the products of our cleverness. That the most authoritative and imperious of the gods gives us these instincts need not imply a different, as yet unmentioned, source for morality. Rather, this looks like a reference to the *authority* that our ethical impulses hold over us. If we were to convert that detail back into a *logos*, then it would correspond to Aristotle's claim that *politikê technê* is the governing art, standing in command over our other skills, sciences and goals³⁵—just as Zeus sits in command over Athena, Hephaestus, Ares, and Aphrodite.

It is useful here to note another detail of the later Aristotelian theory, one that seems to express a similar view, to show that this interpretation is not just a projection onto Protagoras of Darwinian thinking. Aristotle uses the term *phronêsis* to refer to ethical and political wisdom, and so treats *phronêsis* as almost synonymous with *politikê technê* (EN 1141 b 23–24, EE 1218 b 13–14). He says that *phronêsis*, although it is closely tied to deliberation, is not the same as mere cleverness (EN 1144 a 22–29). Cleverness, *deinotês*, enables us to figure out how to accomplish our goals, but no amount of cleverness on its own, no amount of mere reasoning, can make our goals ethically good in the first place. To have the right goals we also need goodness of character (1144 a 7, a 30–36)—the original sense of 'ethical' goodness—which Aristotle thinks is tied to pre-rational and natural emotional dispositions. Moral wisdom, as opposed to cleverness, requires 'natural goodness' (φυσικὴ ἀρετή), by which he means innate normative tendencies of the right kind, as he makes very clear (1144 b 4–6). This corresponds closely to our reading of the story. Prometheus (i.e., our cleverness) cannot deliver *ethical* wisdom; before we can develop ethical wisdom we need something more: we need a gift from Zeus (i.e., the natural endowment of those special authoritative or normative instincts). This interpretation also makes fuller sense of the choice of Zeus as the god for that gift. Prometheus is a god who shows us how

³⁵ EN 1094 a 25–28: πειρατέον τύπω γε περιλαβεῖν αὐτὸ [sc. ἡ εὐδαιμονία] τί ποτ' ἐστὶ καὶ τίνος τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἢ δυνάμεων. δόξειε δ' ἂν τῆς κυριωτάτης καὶ μάλιστα ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς. τοιαύτη δ' ἡ πολιτικὴ φαίνεται (...).

to do things. He is the god of deliberation and reasoning. But deliberation is about means, not ends. To have the right goals, and hence to be morally good, we need the god who tells us *what* to do, rather than how to do it. Zeus is pre-eminently the god who commands.

- (4) The same natural principle is invoked in the story to account for the development of these ethical dispositions as Protagoras earlier used to explain the biological endowments of the other animals: namely, the drive to survive. Human beings, without an ethical sense, were *dying out*, he says, until Zeus stepped in to prevent their extinction. Likewise, the other animals were given their various features to prevent *their* extinction.³⁶ So, shouldn't this 'gift' imply the same process as in those other cases?—namely, the blind experimentation of nature, and the perpetuation of natural traits (in this case, behavioural instincts) that enabled or promoted our survival. Protagoras would then mean something like this: that human beings who happened not to possess cooperative and social instincts perished; those who happened to possess them flourished—and we are all the descendants of the latter. Our ethical predispositions, on this reading, arose by the same natural process, *whatever exactly that was*, as did human physiology, and in the same way as the physical organs of the other animals, as described in the first half of the story.³⁷ If we read the story in this way, then the

³⁶ Compare 321 A 1–2 ταῦτα δὲ ἐμηχανάτο εὐλάβειαν ἔχων μὴ τι γένος αἰστωθεῖν (Epimetheus equipping the animals) and 322 C 1 Ζεὺς οὖν δέσας περὶ τῷ γένει ἡμῶν μὴ ἀπόλοιτο πᾶν (Zeus giving us our moral sense). We find the same verbal underlining of the uniformity of the causal principle in Lucretius (probably indicating the same in Democritus): compare 5.849–850 (why animals have the features they do): *multa videmus enim rebus concurrere debere, | ut propagando possint procudere saecula* and 5.1026–1028 (why human beings acquired fairness): *aut genus humanum iam tum foret omne peremptum | nec potuisset adhuc perducere saecula propago*.

³⁷ Campbell 2003, 252–261 argues persuasively that Lucr. 5.1011–1027 implies exactly this view. The following details dispose him to a biological reading: (1) Epicurus (Lucretius) always treats human beings as just another animal. (2) He explicitly treats *behavioural dispositions* of animals as having been formed by their contribution to survival, just like their physical organs. (Thus, lions have courage, deer are flighty, and foxes have cunning, because without those behavioural dispositions their species would not have persisted [5.855–863]). (3) He says (5.864–870) that some species (domesticated animals) persisted by cooperating with human beings (i.e., by acquiring *that* behavioural disposition). The claim, then, that human beings survived by cooperating *with one another* cries out to be connected with these other claims. In the case of lions, deer, foxes, sheep and cows, Epicurus is clearly referring to behavioural instincts. We should probably take the human case the same way. Once again we may note that if this theory goes back to Democritus (as seems extremely likely) then it formed part of Protagoras' immediate intellectual context.

significance of the allegorical motif of divine gifts is consistent. Our physiology is natural, and is given to us by a god (Epimetheus); our technical cleverness is also a feature of our nature, and is likewise based on divine gifts (taken from Athena and Hephaestus). But the *products* of our intelligence (clothing, shelter, agriculture) are by definition artificial, and cultural, and in the story those are *not* given to us directly by any god. We discover them on our own, using our natural ingenuity. Then the final gift from Zeus refers once again, on this interpretation, to a given feature of our nature—consistently with the rest of the allegory.

- (5) Notice that one of the things that Zeus gives us is 'shame' (*aidôs*). Shame is, among other things, an emotional response, a strong but inarticulate feeling that arises in us when we treat someone wrongly or are thinking of doing so. It is just the kind of thing that plausibly depends on instinct, exactly like other basic human desires and emotions that we are happy to ascribe to our nature. It is obviously a quite different thing from written laws and agreements, or from any sort of calculation of our interests, and something much more basic than what we normally mean by a social convention. If only for the sake of symmetry, we should also probably assume that *dikê* refers to our *sense* of fairness and our *emotional attachment* to fairness (which shows itself, for example, in the anger we feel when we are treated unfairly) rather than signifying law or contract. Rather than being the product of *nomos*, these things—our feelings about right and wrong—form the human character at the most basic level, and are the foundation upon which we *then* construct our consciously articulated principles and social conventions.
- (6) There are also positive philosophical objections to reading the allegory as intimating a contract theory as construed by Glaucon or Callicles. First, innate behavioural tendencies would be much more effective at aiding survival than a morality that depends on faulty human calculation and agreement. So according to the principle employed in the story, a morality arising from *phusis* would make much more sense. It would be deeper, less reflective, and therefore more dependable; so it would make the groups of the people who had it much more likely to persist.³⁸ Second, the contract theory takes it for granted that people

³⁸ In fact, this 'survival principle' doesn't just tell against the idea of the conscious social contract; it works equally well against any theory that makes the foundation of morality something that has to be consciously articulated. A theory like Plato's or Kant's that makes 'true' morality depend on a particular kind of knowledge, or precise rational principles, or a

have a large set of very complicated but *selfish* desires, and that on the basis of those they artificially construct their attachment to fairness. This is supposed to be a plausible simplification of morality's origin. But why are these selfish instincts any easier to account for than an interest in fairness itself? It is a baseless assumption that our survival instinct, or our love of food, sex, children, status, power, beauty and wealth are any simpler than the ethical likes and dislikes that the contract theory is trying to account for. Be that as it may, there is also the larger problem of explaining how exactly we could get from those selfish desires to codes of fairness by way of calculation (implied by the idea of contract or convention). The sketch of this process offered by Glaucon and Callicles is wholly inadequate. They propose that people actually figured out that fairness would best serve their individual interests (on average) more than the countless other behavioural strategies they could have chosen instead. This is at best only superficially plausible. On closer examination it is quite fantastic. True, with our strong attachment to fairness already in place it is easy enough to spot some of its beneficial effects and figure out roughly how it functions. But if we propose on that basis that at some time in the past we actually instituted it, then we may just as well claim that our ancestors invented the circulation of the blood, or our respiratory system, on the grounds that we know roughly how those work, too, and have the desires and goals that would motivate us to design them. That would be a huge overestimation of our abilities as engineers. But our willingness to believe that we ourselves engineered our own complex and finely tuned sense of fairness is hardly any less deluded.

The fact that the simplest form of the social contract turns up in the amoralist theories of Callicles and Glaucon does not give us any reason to attribute the same theory to Protagoras. Quite the opposite. Plato's attacks on ethical naturalism probably work by misrepresenting it—through oversimplification, for example. The amoralist contract theory of those

religious view that ties morality to a particular religion, ends up asserting that at least some people *now* have no 'true' morality (since they lack that knowledge, or those principles, or that religion) and that most people in the past (and certainly our more distant ancestors) must have been pre-moral, because they lived long before our recent intellectual and philosophical (or religious) progress. But if this naturalist hypothesis is correct, that morality is an essential tool of our survival, then it follows that there *never has been*, and *never could be*, any functioning and persisting human society that did not have morality as much as any other. An amoral society would be as likely as a society where nobody eats, or nobody has children.

fictional characters, although advanced with vigour and rhetorical skill, is a carefully erected, rather ugly straw man. Protagoras' story contains no claims about human beings consciously basing fairness on their own selfishness, and not the slightest trace of amorality. Rather, it states that Zeus gave us our sense of fairness to enable us to survive, and it is an open question what that means when extracted from his allegory; and we should attribute to him the most plausible theory that we can within the bounds of his historical and intellectual context.

For these various reasons I think that we should see in the story an outline of the idea that our inclination towards fairness is a *natural* endowment; a characteristic of the species—something a little like the idea currently proposed by Darwinian theory.³⁹ What Protagoras means, on this reading, when he says that Zeus gave us morality to prevent our extermination, is that our ethical sense arose, somehow, because it did as a matter of fact aid our survival, exactly as the endowments of the other animals aided their survival, but *not* that we ever figured out its value ourselves, or 'internalized' it by some essentially cultural process. In the same way, a bear's sharp and powerful teeth came into being because they enabled it to perpetuate its kind, but the bear never had any thoughts at all about that fact, and did not need to, because, fortunately for the bear, it was not responsible for designing its own teeth.

3. THE STRENGTHS OF 'PROTAGOREAN' NATURALISM

Assuming that we have read the story correctly, let us now consider the important differences between this ethical theory and the social contract theory as Plato understands it (or would have us understand it). The essential difference is this. On the view that the story seems to sketch out for us, there is a separation of *biological explanation* and *human deliberation*. The story

³⁹ There is now a broad consensus, at least among evolutionary biologists, that we have both an instinctive sense of fairness and an instinctive emotional response to it, which evolved because, on average, they maximized the material interests and reproductive fitness of the individuals who possessed them (or perhaps of the groups in which they predominated in competition with other less co-operative groups). For a sample of the work on our innate sense of fairness, see Axelrod 1984; Cosmides & Tooby 1992; Dawkins 1989, 202–233; Ridley 1996, 53–84; Pinker 1997, 402–406, 502–506; Hauser 2006, 59–110, 251–263, 383–392. It is obviously *not* part of this view that all societies have exactly the same ideas about fairness. Rather, the idea is that different cultures generate parametric variations of universal principles, just as they do in the case of language. See Hauser 2006, 72–74, 83–85.

can explain morality in terms of its biological and material contribution—that is, its contribution to our survival—without thereby implying that the same facts have to provide us with our *reasons* for treating each other fairly. That idea has the potential to remove what Plato sees as the central flaw of naturalist ethical theories. That flaw is articulated in the opening books of the *Republic*, where Glaucon gives a version of the theory as an argument against morality. Suppose that some time in the past, says Glaucon (358 E 2–361 D 1), before we yet had any ethical tendencies at all, we adopted fairness, by a kind of agreement, only so as to maximize our own amoral and selfish interests. In that case we clearly have no reason at all to act fairly if we can be sure that acting unfairly will benefit us (without cost). If fairness is ultimately based only on selfishness, then we should simply cast off our moral commitments (and all the more vigorously if they have been insidiously ‘internalised’) and be as selfish as possible, consistently with our original purpose, if by good fortune we find ourselves strong enough to exploit others and avoid punishment.

This argument seems to show that there can be no purely material justification of morality that would not collapse under certain conditions. By material justification I mean one that explains its importance by appeal to its material benefits to purely selfish (i.e., not yet ethical) individuals⁴⁰—by appeal to its promotion of our physical survival, for instance. If we believe in the *absolute* value and importance of morality, and are looking for a commitment to justice that will be able to survive any test—even the ring of Gyges—then we have to find some altogether different, and equally absolute basis for its value. To Plato’s mind, it follows that any theory that posits a material origin for morality must in the end lead to the hedonism and amoralism advocated by Callicles and Thrasymachus (*Resp.* 343 B 1–344 C 9), since any such defence seems to entail that we do not after all value morality for its own sake, but only if and when it suits our amoral desires and needs.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Plato’s challenge applies to any theory that bases moral interests on more basic desires, reasons, or interests (or any other item of *our psychology*) by whatever mechanism. Nussbaum is right to see that the problem applies even to the more subtle Humean idea of justice as an ‘artificial virtue’: “it seems to follow from the Humean account that we have reason to be just and law-abiding only when we are convinced that it is advantageous, in terms of other, more fundamental ends, to be so” (2001, 447 n. 32).

⁴¹ That, I suspect, explains the presence of hedonism in the *Protagoras*. Protagoras by all accounts, including his portrayal in this dialogue, was in no sense a hedonist or an amoralist. But Plato’s view is that any humanistic world-view must ultimately be equivalent to hedonism, whether its advocate acknowledges this or not. The dialogue shows us Plato’s mixed feelings

But Plato is probably wrong about this. The biological version of naturalism—the one that is arguably sketched in Protagoras' story—does *not* lead us to hedonism or amoralism. It has the potential to dissolve Plato's worries about the social contract and his broader fear of all forms of naturalist, god-free ethics. Protagoras has imagined material and non-moral *causes* for morality in our ancient biological evolution, but not materialist (and hence amoral) *reasons* for morality in current human deliberation. Selfishness simply does not come into it. Protagoras can be claiming that ethical predispositions came to be part of human nature and human character because they enabled us to survive, and that those predispositions themselves, combined with an upbringing that activates them and develops them, provide us with our reasons—the familiar, *fully ethical* reasons—for treating each other the way we do. We can have our interest in fairness itself, as Plato assumes we must, and as introspection demands, *and* claim that we have acquired that interest not because it was given to us by god, or by the rationally guided cosmos, or by the rules of logic, but just because without it we would not have made it this far.⁴²

Such a theory cannot provide us with a philosophical justification for ethical interests of the kind that Plato (and we) may be looking for—the kind that equates moral truths with mathematical truths, or that sees morality as tied to some aspect of rationality itself, or as part of the fabric of the wider universe. But it can easily defeat Plato's energetic and entertaining *reductio* of ethical naturalism, the arguments of Callicles, Glaucon and Thrasymachus. This more subtle Protagorean view makes nonsense of the idea that, if there are no gods to prop up morality, we might as well opt out of it, or 'shake off' our commitment to treating people fairly. To use the central idea of the story, that makes about as much sense as imagining that a swallow could opt out

about Protagoras by having Socrates *foist* a hedonistic view on him, to his obvious discomfort. Plato is saying, in effect, "Protagoras may not have been a hedonist, but his view gives him no resources for avoiding hedonism."

⁴² It is on this point I disagree with Nussbaum. She defends the Protagorean view by taking him to mean that human nature is social and ethical *all the way down*, so to speak (²⁰⁰¹, 102), but she sees the claim that justice is a means to *survival* as contradicting that idea. The problem is that there are two senses of 'human nature' here: (1) fundamental human *psychological* instincts, and (2) human *biology*. We can treat human psychology as ethical all the way down, but also say that our psychological tendencies themselves are essentially a means (from the biological point of view) to something non-ethical, our survival. The whole point of ethical naturalism, after all, and Protagoras' aim, is to explain the ethical dispositions in non-ethical terms—to give them a non-ethical origin, in line with their *non-divine* origin—so it makes no sense at all to remove that part of his theory, as Nussbaum does.

of its feathers, or that a tortoise could cast off its shell. It also shows us that humanism does not have to lead to Callicles' depressing idea that since only selfish desires are 'natural', our ethical interests have to be plastered over our nature; forced on us by social conventions. Protagoras offers an account (at least a sketch of an account) of how ethical interests might themselves have come to be an important part of human nature, biologically rather than culturally internalised, and on an exactly equal footing with those other interests. And on that view we obviously have every reason to endorse and support whatever laws and cultural practices best express those interests. His theory also succeeds in its main and original purpose of vindicating the democratic approach to the political and civic task, because it explains why the ethical talents required for good citizenship are *bound to be* the common property of humanity, the result of our universal nature and of a common and uncomplicated upbringing, rather than the product of rare cognitive attainments and elite philosophical training.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

PROTAGORAS' MYTH IN PLATO'S *PROTAGORAS*: FICTION OR TESTIMONY?

Bernd Manuwald

The historical Protagoras as well as his philosophical and rhetorical theories were well known in ancient Athens, as can be inferred from a great number of reactions. Plato himself must have regarded discussing the positions advanced by Protagoras as so important that he has him lecture at length in the *Protagoras* and makes Socrates speak adopting the role of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. Hence Plato's writings are among the most extensive testimonies to the views of this 'sophist'. A solution to the problem of how these texts may be used as sources of what Protagoras actually said becomes thus all the more important. In what follows I will try to find some answers to this frequently asked question, focusing on Protagoras' Great Speech in the dialogue named after him (*Prot.* 320 C 8–328 D 2) and particularly on the part that contains the well-known myth (320 C 8–323 A 4).¹

If the value of this speech as a source is to be assessed, the two extreme positions that are theoretically possible, i.e., 'verbatim rendering of Protagoras' words' and 'mere fiction of Plato's' can be excluded—or at least regarded as implausible—right from the start. The view that Plato gives a literal quotation of a speech by Protagoras is untenable since the speech contains an allusion to a performance of Pherecrates' comedy *Savages* in 420 BC (327 D 3–4) and at the same time presents Pericles' sons, who died in 429 BC, as alive and present (328 C 6–D 2). This contradiction cannot be reconciled with possible utterances of the historical Protagoras. Hence Plato must be credited with having a large share in this speech, as he seems not too concerned with

¹ Lampert (2010, 50 n. 54) defines the following as "scholarly consensus": "the speech Plato gives Protagoras faithfully represents the historical Protagoras's views". Van Riel, who argues that "the doctrines of the myth" are largely Platonic, at the same time regards it as possible that Plato has adapted a text by the historical Protagoras (2012, 162). On Van Riel's interpretation see also notes 11 and 21 below. Denyer 2008 does not address the problem in how far the myth may represent ideas of the historical Protagoras; neither does Calame 2012.

absolute historical truth. On the other hand, mere fiction is equally unlikely: Plato would have been considered unreliable by his contemporaries, who still had access to the writings of the historical Protagoras, if he had made him voice beliefs that sounded implausible when attributed to Protagoras. Therefore it is most likely that Plato has his Protagoras advocate positions that he and his audience would have regarded as possible views of the historical figure.

At the same time one has to allow for the possibility that Plato has his Protagoras present interpretations of the views of his historical namesake, or draw conclusions from them that the actual Protagoras did not. There is a range of possibilities of how Plato's portrayal and the views of the historical Protagoras may relate to each other. Methodologically speaking, convincing hypotheses are the only solutions to be arrived at in view of the available evidence. This does not mean, however, that scholars must limit themselves to rather general considerations of plausibility.² What has to be done instead is to find in the text of the dialogue relevant indications that suggest at least a large degree of probability that Plato is referring to positions of the historical Protagoras. The application of such a method seems possible with respect to some features of Protagoras' speech.

After having ascertained in how far the speech of Plato's Protagoras taken as a whole provides information about views and methods of his historical namesake, one can move on and try to find out to what extent the myth, narrated as part of this speech, can function as a source for the historical Protagoras.

1. THE GREAT SPEECH AND THE INCORPORATION OF THE MYTH

Protagoras' Great Speech in Plato's dialogue is a reaction to Socrates' request that he explain in greater detail that virtue (*ἀρετή*) can be taught (320 B 8–C 1). Previously, Socrates had doubted (on the authority of the Athenians!) that virtue, which Protagoras professes to be able to teach, could be taught at all (319 A 3–320 B 5).

In looking at Protagoras' response, let us first focus on the remarkable phenomenon of a notable repetition: five times in the course of the speech it is stated that all human beings share or must share respect for the rights of

² This route is followed by Vegetti in his interpretation (2004, esp. 154ff.); similarly Senzasono 2007, 98f., and Lampert in a brief footnote (2010, 50 n. 54).

others or self-restraint (αἰδώς / σωφροσύνη)³ and justice (δίκη / δικαιοσύνη), or else human societies (πόλεις) could not exist.⁴ This statement is obviously intended to appear as the main belief of the Protagoras of the dialogue. Hence one might infer that it agrees with views of the historical Protagoras, at least as regards its general tenor: such a repetition can be characteristic of Protagoras only if a contemporary audience can make a connection with the historical figure.

Nevertheless, there is the possibility that this connection could also be a negative one: the point of Plato's method would then consist in the very fact that the historical Protagoras did not advance this particular theory. But in order to be consistent, one would then have to assume as well that Plato had invented this theory for his Protagoras in order to allow Socrates to discuss it, which is rather implausible. For Socrates' criticism is not directed against the statement as such, claiming that σωφροσύνη and δικαιοσύνη are indispensable for human societies; instead it becomes clear in the course of the dialogue that the Platonic Socrates criticizes the unclear or unexplained implications of this view: what about the unity of these two (and further) virtues, what is their relationship to knowledge?

Plato's strategy will make sense only if the main thesis itself can be taken as a fixed starting-point and is then discussed with respect to its actual meaning. Also, there is no fundamental opposition between the two interlocutors. On the contrary, they are in agreement on an important principle: Protagoras too is presented as a person who regards virtue as something beautiful, and he even expresses this view emphatically (349 E 3–6). When Socrates puts to the test Protagoras' opinion that σωφροσύνη and δικαιοσύνη are necessary for the existence of human societies, the procedure is similar to the discussion of the *homo mensura*-doctrine in the *Theaetetus* (152 A 1–183 C 7). Hence it is probable that Protagoras' belief set forth in the dialogue named after him goes back to the historical Protagoras; it is, as it were, the anthropological-political equivalent of his epistemological principles.

Ascribing both theories to the historical Protagoras does not create a contradiction. For the view stressed in the *Protagoras*, that norms are indispensable for societies to exist (in that human beings share in σωφροσύνη

³ In explaining the myth, Protagoras picks up αἰδώς (*Prot.* 322 C 2)—an expression due to the poetic colour of the myth (just as δίκη)—by σωφροσύνη (323 A 2), treating the terms as equivalent to each other. σωφροσύνη then refers to limiting oneself to the area granted to one person, i.e., to the avoidance of trespassing on others. Cp. Manuwald 1999, 196 f.; 201; Rademaker 2005, 300 f.

⁴ *Prot.* 323 A 2–3; B 7–C 2; C 4; 324 D 7–E 2; 326 E 7–327 A 2.

and δικαιοσύνη), allows for different conceptions of what, for instance, is regarded as just. That means that the simultaneous validity of distinct conceptions of justice in different communities, as implied in the *homo mensura*-doctrine, can be reconciled with Protagoras' requirements for all members of a society as they are outlined in the *Protagoras*. For when Plato has Socrates defend Protagoras' views in the *Theaetetus* (165 E 8–168 C 5), the following principles are voiced: what any community regards as just is just for them, as long as they consider it just, and the politician who manages to create circumstances that are good for the citizens and are seen by them as such instead of circumstances that are bad for them, proves to be a sage (167 C 2–7).⁵ As presented by Plato, Protagoras' anthropological-political principle can easily be integrated with his arguments attested elsewhere. When Plato has thereby constructed his Protagoras without contradictions, this result is indicative of Plato's attempt to report at least the basis for the discussion with the historical Protagoras correctly.

As for Protagoras' boastful speech in the dialogue *Protagoras* in its entirety (320 C 8–328 D 2), it is striking that it starts with a discussion of the form in which Protagoras might comply with Socrates' request. Protagoras offers two options: should he narrate a story (μῦθος) or present an argument (λόγος)?⁶ When he is given the choice, he generously opts for the story as the more attractive (χαριέστερον) form (320 C 2–7). In fact, however, Protagoras does not stick to his preference for a μῦθος over a λόγος, but presents a μῦθος and a λόγος successively, as he says himself at the end of his speech (328 C 3–4). Yet his explicit transition to the λόγος (324 D 6–7) does not coincide with the unmarked factual transition at a much earlier point in the speech (from 322 D 5 onwards), where he stops talking in the style of the mythical narrative.

By this demonstration of how Protagoras deals with various forms of presentation Plato characterizes Protagoras' methods as both experienced and random. And the way in which the Great Speech with the myth is structured itself reveals an implicit criticism of this randomness: as can be inferred from narratives of myths in other dialogues, μῦθος and λόγος are not easily interchangeable for a Platonic narrator of myths. Moreover, the prominent paratactic style (λέξις εἰρομένη) of Protagoras' myth does not agree with the style of Platonic myths in other dialogues.⁷ This suggests that

⁵ Cp. Kerferd 1949/50, 25; Döring 1981, 111–113; also Zilioli 2007, 100–102.

⁶ What is important here is not only the simple contrast between μῦθος and λόγος, but primarily μῦθον λέγων in contrast to λόγῳ διεξελθών, 320 C 3–4.

⁷ On these issues see Manuwald 2002, 60 ff.; 2003, 41 ff.

for the narrative of his Protagoras Plato has adopted the mythical way of presentation of the historical Protagoras as well as his narrative style. That the narrative of a myth can indeed function as a means of sophistic *epideixis* is proved by Prodicus' story of Heracles at the crossroads (Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.21–34; DK 84 B 2, II.313–316). On a certain level Protagoras' myth in Plato's dialogue can also be seen as a *protreptikos* to virtue.

The hypothesis of an attempted similarity to a myth of the historical Protagoras can be confirmed by further remarkable inconsistencies in the course of the conversation. Socrates had refuted Protagoras' assertion (that what he claims to be teaching, i.e., virtue, can be taught) by two series of arguments: (1) the fact that the Athenians grant permission to discuss technical questions exclusively to experts, but allow everyone to talk about political problems, immediately suggested to Socrates that they do not regard the latter as teachable in contrast to the former (319 B 5–D 7). (2) The leading figures in the state are not able to pass on their abilities to their sons (319 D 7–320 B 3). Yet Plato has the interlocutor Protagoras claim that the myth will disprove Socrates' argument (320 C 2); in fact, however, it only deals with the arguments in the first part of Socrates' speech. Besides, the myth corresponds to Socrates' first argument against the view that virtue is teachable (319 B 5–D 7) only in so far as it refers to its factual precondition, namely the Athenians' behaviour in popular assemblies.

This structure of the discussion is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the argument based on the behaviour of the people in the popular assembly occurs in connection with the question of whether virtue can be taught only in the *Protagoras*, while the same context in the *Meno* merely uses Socrates' second argument (*Prot.* 319 D 7–320 B 3), namely that the leading men in the state cannot pass on their abilities (*Meno* 93 C 6–94 E 1).⁸ The reason could be that Plato has Socrates use the argument based on the behaviour of the popular assembly in order to create a starting point for the myth.

The second noteworthy detail is that the myth—even though Protagoras' announcement creates the impression that he is going to answer all of Socrates' arguments (320 C 2–7)—does not even refer to the main thrust of Socrates' first argument ([1] 319 D 6–7), since the aspect of whether or not virtue can be taught is not directly mentioned in the myth. Instead, the myth (320 C 8–322 D 5), its interpretation (322 D 5–323 A 4) and the additional

⁸ Cp. also [Plato] *Alc.* I, 118 C 7–119 A 5.

arguments (323 A 5–C 2) lead to the thesis that—in contrast to technical accomplishments—each human being shares in the abilities necessary for societies to exist; this is presented as a universal belief, and hence the Athenians and other peoples act correctly when they grant everybody access to political issues. Only after a clearly marked new start (and without any backward reference to the argumentation of the myth), does Protagoras engage with Socrates' conclusion from the behaviour of the Athenians, namely the question of whether or not virtue can be taught (323 C 3–324 D 1).

Even though at this point the Platonic Protagoras has actually abandoned the form of *μῦθος* long since, the explicit transition to a *λόγος* happens much later (324 D 6–7), when Protagoras turns to Socrates' second argument ([2] 319 D 7–320 B 3). Protagoras' whole discussion of Socrates' first argument (319 B 5–D 7) thus seems to be determined by the myth, but this does not apply to its entirety and precisely not with regard to the actual question of whether or not virtue can be taught. This arrangement of Protagoras' speech as a whole does not invite the assumption that it is the result of Plato's inability, in the sense that he invented a myth for Protagoras that does not agree with the question at issue. It is more likely, therefore, that the inconsistent structure of Protagoras' speech has been caused by the fact that an existing myth was to be used, even if not entirely appropriate, because it was characteristic of the historical figure.

That the myth has not been completely integrated into Protagoras' speech and, beyond that, into the argument of the whole dialogue is corroborated by another observation: in his exposition subsequent to the myth, the Platonic Protagoras introduces being pious (*ῥσιον εἶναι*, 325 A 1)⁹ as analogous to *σωφροσύνη* and *δικαιοσύνη* and thus reckons the former among the indispensable abilities for living in a community. Consequently, Socrates later regards being pious as a virtue and calls it *δσιότης* (329 C 5). In the myth, however, being pious is not connected with the gifts from Zeus (*αἰδώς* / *σωφροσύνη* and *δίκη* / *δικαιοσύνη*). Instead it is already present (though not named explicitly) even prior to the differentiated technical development, since humans are the only living beings who believe in gods and erect altars and statues of gods (322 A 3–5).¹⁰ It follows that the Platonic Protagoras views people's religious

⁹ Cp. also *Prot.* 325 D 4.

¹⁰ Protagoras' exposition of human belief in gods does not contradict his theological agnosticism (DK 80 B 4, II.265), as has been shown by Müller (1976, 316–318): it is most likely a mythical transposition of the *homo mensura*-doctrine (DK 80 B 1, II.262–264) to the world of the gods, as the notion of human belief in gods is a projection or a mirror image of human

behaviour in the myth differently from the way he does elsewhere in the dialogue, without this difference being made use of for the argument.¹¹ This fact too suggests that the myth is based on the historical Protagoras rather than on a Platonic fiction.

There are obviously good reasons for ascribing the basic ideas of the myth to the historical Protagoras; an analysis of its structure and meaning therefore becomes all the more important.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE MYTH

The myth (320 C 8–322 D 5) consists of two major sections: the first one aims at distinguishing between creatures not equipped with reason (ἄλογα) and human beings, in so far as other living beings are sufficiently equipped through the faculties (δυνάμεις) that Epimetheus had distributed among them, whereas human beings can only exist by means of cultural techniques based on the knowledge that Prometheus had stolen from Hephaestus and Athena and given to men (320 C 8–322 A 2). The second section outlines the basic differentiation between these cultural techniques and the social abilities of human beings, and points out the absolute necessity and superiority of the latter: they derive from Zeus, the supreme god (322 A 3–D 5).

Comparison of the activities of Epimetheus with those of Prometheus results in a stark contrast between ἄλογα and human beings (321 C 1): while the former are equipped with 'natural' faculties (δυνάμεις), which allow them to cope with the demands of life, a similar set-up is not available to

affairs.—Irrespective of his own views about the gods, the historical Protagoras could not pass over the phenomenon that humans believe in gods and honour them by various cult practices.

¹¹ This difference is an argument against Van Riel's view (2012, 159–162) that the myth included a Platonic thesis to the effect "that religion—an effect of the possession of fire—is more deeply rooted in human nature than sociality" (161), particularly since the Platonic Protagoras does not simply explain the veneration of gods as an "effect of the possession of fire", but more fundamentally as a result of the relationship of human beings to gods (322 A 4; i.e., owing to ἐντεχὸς σοφία, linked to the use of fire and deriving from Athena and Hephaestus, cp. 321 D 1–2); see also Manuwald 1999, 191–193. Besides, it is methodologically problematic with respect to the myth, defined as an utterance by Protagoras (irrespective of the fact whether it has been written as Protagorean or is modelled on the historical Protagoras), to try to prove that there is "a thoroughly Platonic content" (162) on the basis of individual similarities and differences between the myth and statements in other Platonic dialogues (cp. esp. *Prot.* 322 D 4–5 ~ *Politicus* 308 E 8–309 A 3; Van Riel 2012, 155–156).

human beings, since the *δυνάμεις* had already been used up for the *ἄλογα*. Human beings therefore have to rely on cultural techniques. And that their basis derives from the gods indicates—outside the mythical framework—that techniques based on knowledge are fundamentally different from the *δυνάμεις* of the *ἄλογα*.

A closer look at the narrative structure of Protagoras' myth reveals that the story of the origin of living beings and the development of mankind is mainly characterized by a combination of traditional mythical elements and 'scientific' discoveries.¹² 'Mythical elements' include the belief that living beings are created and given form by the gods (320 D 1–3) or by the divine orders given to Prometheus and Epimetheus (who, however, assume functions not attested for them in earlier literature: 320 D 3–6). Further, gods appear associated with their traditional spheres (Athena and Hephaestus: 321 D 1–E 3), and the myth closes with Zeus' helpful intervention by means of his messenger Hermes—narrated via a verbatim rendering of the speeches by Zeus and Hermes (322 C 1–D 5).

These mythical details in Protagoras' myth are supplemented by features which may be regarded as 'scientific elements': the doctrine of the (four) substances implied in the creation of living beings (320 D 2–3), the idea of equality in the sense of biological stability effected by the distribution of faculties over the individual creatures, which is based on a rational method (320 D 8–321 B 6),¹³ as well as aspects of a doctrine of cultural development (of the ascending type). Protagoras adds this doctrine in order to prove that social abilities are superior to and more important than technical ones (322 A 2–B 8).¹⁴

What is particularly interesting is how these 'scientific elements' have been connected with the myth. For instance, the idea of biological stability is traced back to the activities of Epimetheus, who—in spite of his name—carries out a provident and tailored distribution of the *δυνάμεις*, which ensures the

¹² The (somewhat problematic) expression 'scientific' has been chosen for simplicity's sake. It is intended to denote elements of the myth that originate in empirical observation or philosophical and ontological speculation and that by virtue of their form or content could occur also in contexts other than a myth (and at least in part are attested in other contexts).—This distinction is not meant to ascribe less importance to the mythical elements in relation to the non-mythical ones—neither for Protagoras' myth nor for other myths in Plato—, but simply to indicate that the myths contain elements of different types.

¹³ A similar thought is found in Herodotus 3.108–109 (καί πως τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ προνοία, ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι, ἐοῦσα σοφὴ (...), 3.108.2); on this parallel and on the question of the origin of this theory cp. Demont 1994.

¹⁴ For further details see Manuwald 1999, 172 ff.; also 2006, 93 ff.

survival of the species for non-human beings.¹⁵ His only 'mistake' (criticized by the narrator) is that in the distribution of these δυνάμεις none has been left for human beings. However, this turns out to be a *felix culpa*: for only as a result of this oversight do human beings get the chance to enjoy the 'divine' faculties that are necessary for their lives and are granted to them by Prometheus and ultimately by Zeus.¹⁶

So Protagoras' myth turns out to be structured in a complex way: there is a combination of an appeal to a traditional belief in anthropomorphic gods, whose speeches can be rendered verbatim, combined with constructs that have been derived from theories about the emergence of living beings and their ways to cope with life, and from empirical observation of the technical abilities and the social behaviour of human beings; this results in a convincing and well-illustrated exposition of the intended argument. In order to demonstrate the necessity of αἰδώς / σωφροσύνη and δίκη / δικαιοσύνη for the existence of human communities, cultural-theoretical considerations are immediately linked with the aim of the argument, as the speaker shows that the lack of these characteristics causes universal war (322 B 6–8).

Because of this blending of traditional and scientific ideas and more generally of the presence of 'non-mythical' elements in the myth it is unlikely that μῦθος and λόγος are real alternatives for Protagoras, and that he is being made to choose the μῦθος since he would be unable to give the reasons for his theory outlined in the μῦθος through a λόγος.¹⁷ A more plausible explanation is that Plato wished to present the historical Protagoras as a

¹⁵ Consequently, there is no 'experimental phase', during which species are being produced that are unfit for survival according to the principle of 'trial and error' (cp. Lucretius 5.837–877).—Hence Epimetheus is not "very unwise" with regard to non-human beings (so Zilioli 2007, 98).

¹⁶ For the purposes of the myth as a narrative, it is 'necessary' for Epimetheus to make a mistake; it is not indicated how Epimetheus could have distributed the δυνάμεις otherwise, so as to leave something to the humans. In fact, nothing must be left, since then the special position of humans could not be illustrated.

¹⁷ Thus, however, Morgan 2000, 138–147.—Protagoras' claim, implied by his procedure, that he is *able* to provide proof either by a μῦθος or a λόγος cannot be regarded as refuted (as Morgan seems to assume) by the fact that *actually* in the *epideixis* as a whole μῦθος and λόγος are not used alternatively and that Protagoras' subsequent considerations build on conclusions arrived at by the myth. Also, the myth is immediately followed by a non-mythical argument with the same aim (i.e., the τεκμήριον, 323 A 5–C 2). If this section does not deal with 'matters of fact', but rather with what human beings say and regard as correct (cp. Morgan 2000, 139–140), Protagoras sticks to the level of argumentation that Socrates had prescribed, or into which he had enticed Protagoras (319 B 3–D 7, cp. esp. οἶονται, C 2 and 7, ἡγοῦνται, D 7).—On the logical problems of Protagoras' exposition see Manuwald 1999, esp. 169–170, 194, and 2006, 89–91; but these problems are independent of the question of 'μῦθος or λόγος'.

typical representative of the sophists, when the figure in the dialogue is introduced as claiming to be equally able to offer a *μῦθος* or a *λόγος*, and at the same time to incorporate a Protagorean myth that builds on contemporary discoveries.

It goes without saying that the distinction between ‘scientific’ and ‘mythical’ is no more than a formal schematization, for the sake of a convenient description of the facts. Whether the historical Protagoras actually wished to adopt an independent ‘scientific’ standpoint in the contemporary discussion of cultural development and collective ethics¹⁸ or held an independent position beyond an “antropologia ‘tecnologica’” and an “antropologia della pleonexia e della adikia”¹⁹ remains a problem to be discussed. Although it is obvious that the myth uses elements from doctrines of cultural development and some anthropological assumptions that certainly do not agree with traditional religious beliefs, one must be cautious with basic categorizing of this kind. An analysis of the specific combination of the single elements in the context of the myth is more promising.²⁰

3. MEANING OF THE MYTH

Indeed, against the background of what is known about doctrines of cultural development from elsewhere, Protagoras’ myth turns out to be a rather bizarre construction. A closer inspection reveals that the emphatic distinction between *δημιουργική* and *πολιτική τέχνη*²¹ is rather artificial: social-communicative phenomena such as religion and language (322 A 3–6) seem to be subsumed under *δημιουργική* by Protagoras, at any rate not under *πολιτική τέχνη*, because in his scenario human beings have already developed religion and language before founding *πόλεις* (322 B 1) and before Zeus grants them the *πολιτική τέχνη*, which—according to Protagoras’ description—consists in an undifferentiated fusion of the art of running a city and of the

¹⁸ As Most (2002, 10, 12) thinks: according to him, Protagoras’ myth deals with “Anthropologie der Politik” and “Entstehung politischer Gemeinschaften”.

¹⁹ This is Vegetti’s view: 2004, 153–154.

²⁰ For further details and problems in the analysis of the text see Manuwald 1996; also Manuwald 1999, 168–236; 2006, 89–112.

²¹ On the changing meaning of *πολιτική τέχνη* in Protagoras’ myth (referring both to the capacity to organize and to defend a city, 322 B 5, and to interpersonal relations expressed in terms of *αἰδώς* / *σωφροσύνη* and *δίκη* / *δικαιοσύνη* 322 B 7–C 3) cp. Adkins 1973, 5–12; Manuwald 1999, 194.—These variations, which are essential for the interpretation of Protagoras’ speech as a whole (see Manuwald 1999, 210–213), are not taken into account by Zilioli (2007, 96; 99) nor by Van Riel (2012).

possession of αἰδώς and δίκη (322 B 7–C 3). As he wishes to highlight the importance of πολιτικὴ τέχνη or of αἰδώς and δίκη, Protagoras passes over the detail, relevant even in his time, that there is a close connection between religion and human behaviour towards one's fellow citizens.²²

In addition, the sequence of (unproblematic) technical and initially unsuccessful social developments as assumed by Protagoras is contradictory in itself. On the one hand, a fairly sophisticated stage of development is presupposed for the threatening lack of σωφροσύνη and δικαιοσύνη (322 A 5–8; B 3–4); this stage is characterized by an organizational structure of shared labour in a community where, for instance, one doctor is sufficient for a great number of people (cp. 322 C 6–7); on the other hand, men are not able to ward off wild animals (322 B 1–2; 4), a problem that cannot have appeared only in this phase.

The discrepancies in the myth of the Platonic Protagoras become even more obvious against the background of other ancient models for the development of mankind. In the scenario transmitted by Diodorus (1.8.1–9, DK 68 B 5.1, II.135.32–136.15) the initial bad plight of human beings affects all areas to an equal extent, and the technical and the social developments (which include the use of language) proceed at the same pace. Whereas Protagoras' version stresses that there are no problems for human beings in the area of δημιουργικὴ τέχνη and that the development (as is indicated with respect to the progress of speech) is completed within a short span of time (ταχύ, 322 A 6), other doctrines of cultural development have emphasized a temporal element, from Xenophanes onwards.²³ There are no indications that the almost canonical principle of gradual development held over centuries was replaced by a different view in the time of Protagoras, since such an alternative concept is implausible in itself.

²² Firmly rooted in Greek thought is the idea that a deed of bloodshed needs to be expiated; cp. e.g. the story of Adrastus in Herodotus (1.35) and the myth of Orestes (Aeschylus, *Ch.* 1027–1039; 1059–1060; *Eu.* 276–283).

²³ DK 21 B 18, I.133.12–14 (Stob. 1.8.2): οὔτοι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖς ὑπέδειξαν, | ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητούντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον.—In the extant fragments of Democritus a relevant term is not attested, but factually he also seems to have assumed a lengthy development (DK 68 B 144, II.170 = Philod. *De mus.* 4.31, 108.29 Kemke; also 68 B 154, II.173 = Plut. *De sollert. an.* 20, 974 A). The author of the Hippocratic treatise *De vetere medicina* presupposes a long development for the area of nutrition (3, 38.3 Heiberg). Isocrates knows of a gradual development (*Panegyricus* 32). According to Philemon, time, not an instructor, has taught the arts (fr. 136 K.-A.). In Moschion time is mentioned as a decisive factor (*TrGF* 97 F 6.18–22). The idea of a long-term development is also present in Epicurus (*Epist. ad Hdt.* 75–76) as well as in Diodorus (1.8.2, 3 and 7).

Another remarkable feature of Protagoras' myth is his assertion that human beings were still living separately even after (technical) development had made some progress (322 A 8–B 1). The separation or the lack of communities is typically a sign of a primitive early stage, prior to all technical (and also linguistic) development.²⁴ Such models of cultural progress are only attested from a later period onwards, but inherently they offer a more convincing concept.

Irrespective of these discrepancies, numerous connections can obviously be established between individual points in Protagoras' myth and specific doctrines of cultural development known from elsewhere; these suggest that Plato's Protagoras was familiar with such theories. Therefore one is justified in assuming that this knowledge would have allowed Protagoras to present a more consistent theory, had this been his intention. Hence it follows that the myth is geared up for another goal; and on this assumption all inconsistencies disappear, and other principles of organization become evident.

Firstly, the myth reveals that human beings seem at a disadvantage owing to Epimetheus' failure in comparison with beings not equipped with reason; in fact, they are far superior to animals because they are 'cultural beings' by virtue of their 'divine' abilities, acquired partly by Prometheus' theft and partly by Zeus' intervention. The consequence of this construction is that both the technical and the social faculties are 'divine' (and thus distinguished from the *δυνάμεις* of the *ἄλογα*) and at the same time have a different status, since the social faculties were beyond Prometheus' reach (321 D 5–7) and could only be granted by the supreme god (322 C 1–D 5). As is particularly clear in the *λόγος* section of Protagoras' speech, which follows the *μῦθος*, these 'god-given' social faculties consist in abilities that can and must be developed by education (cp. 324 D 2–326 E 5). As a consequence, they belong to an area that might be acted upon by a sophist teacher. This is especially true for the evident superiority of *πολιτική τέχνη* or *ἀρετή* (322 B 5, 8; E 2–323 A 1) over *δημιουργική τέχνη*, which is shown to be insufficient in the myth. Protagoras obviously regards the basic ability for social interaction, made possible by *αἰδώς* / *σωφροσύνη* and *δίκη* / *δικαιοσύνη*, as this *τέχνη* or *ἀρετή*, which he—according to Plato—claims to be competent to teach (319 A 3–7; 349 A 2–3).²⁵

The importance of the element of education for the myth as a narrative is also indicated by the following point: according to Zeus' will *αἰδώς* and *δίκη*

²⁴ Cp. Diodorus 1.8.1; Lucr. 5.958–959.

²⁵ 319 A 4 *πολιτική τέχνη*, 349 A 3 *ἀρετῆς διδάσκαλος*.

are to be distributed among all human beings (in contrast to the technical faculties); yet at the same time a law from Zeus is in force, ruling that those who are unable to participate in αἰδώς and δίκη are to be killed, as they constitute a plague (νόσος) on the city (322 D 1–5). This contradiction does make sense if Zeus' utterance is not primarily interpreted as a statement saying that all human beings are by nature equipped for social behaviour,²⁶ but rather as an indication of the absolute importance and necessity of social behaviour, which everyone has to strive for by all possible means so as to avoid being excluded from human society. Such a reading is supported by Protagoras' subsequent argument: with the prospect of possible exile or death, if one does not comply with the rules of society, a life-long education to ἀρετή will actually be taking place (324 D 2–326 E 5).

There is some tension, however, between, on the one hand, Protagoras' view that everyone must share in both αἰδώς / σωφροσύνη and δίκη / δικαιοσύνη (322 C 2–323 A 4) and that everyone can be a teacher of ἀρετή (327 E 1–2) and, on the other, the claim of the sophists that it is they who make their students successful in private and public life (316 B 8–C 2; 318 A 2–319 A 7). In Plato's dialogue, Protagoras solves this discrepancy by saying that he is able to support his students more than anyone else (328 A 8–B 5), since he, being a 'sophist', is more competent. For present purposes it is irrelevant whether this solution is convincing;²⁷ the dialogue *Protagoras* as a whole at any rate suggests that in Plato's view this assertion fails to convince. Yet this does not tell against the interpretation that the historical Protagoras basically viewed his role as Plato had the dialogue's character outline it.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this analysis yields the following results for the myth: it is not conceived as a doctrine of cultural development—a doctrine that would be inconsistent—, but as an entirely consistent advertising speech of a sophist. The elements derived from doctrines of cultural development and scientific theories used in the myth serve the single aim of proving the area for which the sophist claims to be responsible, to be the most important and indispensable for the πόλις, an aim that is further developed

²⁶ In that case it would have to be available to all human beings without exception, as, for instance, the ability to fly is to all beings of the relevant type (cp. 320 E 3–4).

²⁷ Protagoras does not distinguish between qualities necessary for complying with rules that enable societies to exist and others that qualify individuals for a position of leadership.

in the following sections of Protagoras' speech (cp. esp. 328 A 8–B 5). By the mythically flavoured exposition of his subject, Protagoras introduces himself as somebody who—in contrast to other sophists²⁸—teaches abilities of which any human being must have a share at least to some extent; in this way he presents himself as the ideal teacher for democratic Athens. This clearly focused aim of the myth and the complex manner in which Plato has his Protagoras include the myth in his speech suggest as the most plausible reading that the myth in its core originates from the historical Protagoras rather than from Plato himself.²⁹

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²⁸ Cp. 318 D 7–319 A 2.

²⁹ The final draft of this paper was finished in March 2008; some bibliographical references were added during revision in summer 2012.

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CHAPTER NINE

*EUBOULIA AS THE SKILL PROTAGORAS TAUGHT**

Paul Woodruff

When Socrates asks Protagoras what it is that he would teach a young man, according to Plato, Protagoras eventually responds with what evidently is his standard public offer:

[1]

τὸ δὲ μάθημά ἐστιν εὐβουλία περὶ τῶν οἰκείων, ὅπως ἂν ἄριστα τὴν αὐτοῦ οἰκίαν διοικοῖ, καὶ περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως, ὅπως τὰ τῆς πόλεως δυνατώτατος ἂν εἴη καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν.

My lesson is *good judgement* about things domestic, so that he [the student] may best manage his own household, and about things of the *polis*, so that in things of the *polis* he may be most able both in action and in speech.

Plato *Prot.* 318 E 5–319 A 2 (DK 80 A 5, II.256.24–26)

This article attempts a philosophical reconstruction of the virtue Protagoras proposed to teach, on the basis of the slight historical evidence available to us. My aim here is to answer the question: “What might an ancient Greek teacher have proposed to teach by which he could reasonably expect to endow students with this virtue?”

1. PROTAGORAS ON *EUBOULIA*

“Good judgement” translates *euboulia*, and this names a virtue which Plato and most other philosophers treat lightly or ignore,¹ but which was evidently central to the teaching of Protagoras. Protagoras supposes that his teaching is not only sufficient (318 E 5–319 A 2, above) but also necessary for the good management of household and city:

* I am grateful for many suggestions on an earlier form of this paper proposed by members of the conference in Leiden, July 5–7, 2007 and also to the editors of this volume. An earlier version of this paper appeared in print as Woodruff 2008.

¹ On the concept of *euboulia* in other authors, see par. 2 below.

[2]

(...) Πρωταγόρας μὲν ἄρα ὁ Ἀβδηρίτης καὶ Πρόδικος ὁ Κεῖος καὶ ἄλλοι πάμπολλοι δύνανται τοῖς ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν παριστάναι ἰδίᾳ συγγιγνόμενοι ὥς οὔτε οἰκίαν οὔτε πόλιν τὴν αὐτῶν διοικεῖν οἱοῖ τ' ἔσονται, ἐὰν μὴ σφεῖς αὐτῶν ἐπιστατήσωσιν τῆς παιδείας, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ σοφίᾳ οὕτω σφόδρα φιλοῦνται, ὥστε μόνον οὐκ ἐπὶ ταῖς κεφαλαῖς περιφέρουσιν αὐτοὺς οἱ ἑταῖροι'

Protagoras of Abdera and Prodicus of Ceos and very many others are able, by being with them in private, to impress upon their contemporaries that they will not be able to manage either their own home or their city unless they put them in charge of their education; and they are so strongly loved for this wisdom that their companions all but carry them about shoulder-high.

Plato *Resp.* 600 C 7–D 5 (Socrates speaking)

If Protagoras taught *good management*, he might have meant either or both of two things—management that is (A) profitable for the manager, or (B) beneficial for home or city. Some readers have supposed (in accordance with A) that Protagoras proposed to teach you how to wring wealth or power out of your city.² But A cannot be quite right, because profit-making skill would have no clear parallel in household management—one does not want to wring wealth or power out of one's own home, but rather to make the home prosper. In pursuing this goal, one might well profit oneself, but that would be incidental to the goal. So this consideration supports B.

If Protagoras meant his teaching to aim simply at personal profit, then the lesson that was supposed to lead this way might well have been persuasive speech, which he was widely believed to teach, and which (according to Aristophanes) some credulous people supposed to be a tool for achieving power and wealth or, at least, for escaping from creditors.³ Aristotle implies

² δυνατώτατος ... καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν ("most able both in action and in speech", 319 A 1–2, above) could mean 'most powerful', and is often translated that way. But that does not fit the use of that phrase in Thucydides for Pericles (λέγειν καὶ πράσσειν δυνατώτατος, 1.139.4), where the historian is commenting on Pericles' ability rather than his power, and seems to assume that the ability is advantageous to Athens.

³ In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Strepsiades explains his goal in studying: "to twist justice and wipe out my creditors" στρεψοδικῆσαι καὶ τοὺς χρήστας διολισθεῖν (434). Less credulous students probably went to teachers such as Protagoras with other aims, knowing that artfulness in speech is not effective. On the aims of the sophists' teaching see Gagarin 2000. Most Greek literature, from Homer on, represents artfulness in speaking as unpersuasive. Consider the embassy scene in *Iliad* 9, in which Odysseus' artfulness is trumped by Ajax's bluntness, the frequent failures of clever speakers in Greek tragedy, and the many failures of the art in Thucydides. The finest defence speech he had ever heard, for example, failed to save Antiphon, the artful speechwriter (Thuc. 8.68.2). In the *Clouds*, also, Socrates' pupils do not fare well.

that Protagoras taught people to make the weaker argument stronger,⁴ which could imply that they used clever speaking to achieve wealth or power that they did not deserve. Earlier in the *Protagoras*, the young man who is considering entrusting his education to Protagoras tells Socrates what he expects from the teacher:

[3]

εἰ δέ τις ἐκεῖνο ἔροιτο, “Ὁ δὲ σοφιστὴς τῶν τί σοφῶν ἐστίν (sc. ἐπιστήμων);” τί ἂν ἀποκρinoίμεθα αὐτῷ; ποίας ἐργασίας ἐπιστάτης;—τί ἂν εἴποιμεν αὐτὸν εἶναι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἢ ἐπιστάτην τοῦ ποιῆσαι δεινὸν λέγειν;

But if someone would ask this: “Of which of the wise things is the sophist [expert]?” how would we answer him? Over what sort of production is he in charge?—What would we say that he is, Socrates, other than in charge of making people clever at speaking?⁵

Plato *Prot.* 312 D 3–7 (Socrates and Hippocrates speaking)

Some readers have therefore supposed that *clever speaking* is precisely what Protagoras proposes to teach, and that he masked the skill of persuasion under the name of a virtue. On this sort of interpretation, Protagoras is proposing to make his students powerful in the city through their ability to persuade, rather than through real good judgement. But this cannot be the whole answer. Clever speaking may have a role in politics, but it would not be necessary in household management; an Athenian householder does not have to convince his slaves or family of anything. He is the head of the household, and his power at home is absolute, although of course he might prefer to use persuasion rather than force.

I must admit, nevertheless, that the scope of what Protagoras means by *euboulia* is obscure in the larger context of our first text (*Prot.* 318 E 5–319 A 2); he says that *euboulia* is useful both in domestic and in public business, but then almost immediately, in the same context, he agrees to Socrates’ characterization of *euboulia* in purely public terms:

⁴ τὸ τὸν ἥττω ... λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν, Arist. *Rhet.* 1402 a 23–24; see Notomi’s article in this volume, p. 16 above. I consider this at best a possible quotation from Protagoras; it is assigned to a number of sophists and is, in any case, ambiguous. It could mean, for example, (1) “making an immoral case prevail”, or (2) “adding real strength to a weakly argued case”. I will show at the end of this article why I believe that if Protagoras said this, he meant (2)—to teach students to strengthen their arguments.

⁵ Under further questioning, Hippocrates is unable to say what it is that sophists teach you to speak cleverly about.

[4]

ἄρα, ἔφην ἐγώ, ἔπομαί σου τῷ λόγῳ; δοκεῖς γάρ μοι λέγειν τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην καὶ ὑπισχνεῖσθαι ποιεῖν ἄνδρας ἀγαθοὺς πολίτας.
αὐτὸ μὲν οὖν τοῦτό ἐστιν, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ ἐπάγγελμα ὃ ἐπαγγέλλομαι.

"Do I follow you then, in your speech?" I said. "For I think you mean the political *technē* and you promise to make men good citizens."

"That," he said, "is the very proclamation that I proclaim."

Plato *Prot.* 319 A 3–7 (DK 80 A 5, II.256.26–28)

(Protagoras and Socrates speaking; continuation of text [1])

We may well believe that Protagoras proposed to make his students good citizens, but being a good citizen does not seem to cover the domestic value of *euboulia*. On the whole, we look in vain in the *Protagoras* for further evidence about what Protagoras understands good judgement to be. Protagoras gives a comprehensive account of education in his long speech, which is soon to follow, but this does not reveal anything about his specific understanding of *euboulia*. Most likely, Protagoras did not have anything to say on this score, or we would have some evidence of it. Probably, he meant just what ordinary Greeks at the time meant by the word. Therefore, we will have to depend on other sources. We must examine Greek usage of the term at the time.

2. PATTERNS OF *EUBOULIA*

Most authors assume that benefits will flow to an entire city from good judgement in its leaders, and that harm comes to all from bad judgement. Different authors suppose that good judgement arises from different sources. On all views, however, the results are the same: a city governed by leaders with good judgement makes decisions that are best for the whole, and such a city is not likely to be torn apart by factional disputes. In the public sphere, decisions requiring good judgement would resolve such issues as a decision to make war or peace.

Tradition. Thucydides has the Spartan king Archidamus attribute the good judgement of the Spartans to the good order of their constitution, which he contrasts with the clever education of the Athenians (1.84.3):

[5]

πολεμικοί τε καὶ εὐβουλοὶ διὰ τὸ εὖκοσμον γιγνόμεθα, τὸ μὲν ὅτι αἰδῶς σωφροσύνης πλεῖστον μετέχει, αἰσχύνῃ δὲ εὐψυχία, εὐβουλοὶ δὲ ἀμαθέστερον τῶν νόμων τῆς ὑπεροψίας παιδεύμενοι καὶ ξὺν χαλεπότητι σωφρονέστερον ἢ ὥστε αὐτῶν ἀνηκουστεῖν, καὶ μὴ τὰ ἀρχαῖα ξυνετοὶ ἄγαν ὄντες τὰς τῶν πολεμίων παρασκευάς

λόγῳ καλῶς μεμφόμενοι ἀνομοίως ἔργῳ ἐπεξιέναι, νομίζειν δὲ τὰς τε διανοίας τῶν πέλας παραπλησίους εἶναι καὶ τὰς προσπιπτούσας τύχας οὐ λόγῳ διαιρετάς.

Our discipline makes us good soldiers and gives us good judgement. We are good soldiers because our self-control is the chief cause of a sense of shame, and shame of courage, while we have good judgement because our education leaves us too ignorant to look down on the laws, and our self-control is too strict for disobeying them. And we have none of that useless intelligence that condemns the enemy's forces in a fine speech but fails to deliver as good an attack in the field. Instead, we think the plans of our neighbors are as good as our own, and we can't work out whose chances at war are better in a speech.⁶

On this view, good judgement would be following traditional rules; it requires a kind of immunity to the sort of education that leads people to challenge rules. The Spartans were famous for their cultural immunity to the new learning (*Hippias Major* 283 B 4–E 8). Thucydides, in writing this, is setting up the contrast between Athenians, who trust education for good judgement, and Spartans, who see education as destructive of the traditional order, on which they believe good judgement rests.

Knowledge. Socrates, in the *Republic* (428 B 1–429 A 7), speaks of benefits to the city from the knowledge that has been given the guardian class (428 D 6–7), presumably (as we learn later) a close acquaintance with the transcendent Form of Justice. This knowledge is available to the leaders of the Callipolis, but it would not be available to anyone in Athens. Not even Socrates claims to have knowledge of the sort required. So if good judgement is knowledge of this sort (καὶ μὴν τοῦτό γε αὐτό, ἡ εὐβουλία, δῆλον ὅτι ἐπιστήμη τις ἐστίν, *Resp.* 428 B 7–8), we will have to be content with merely seeking it. We cannot use it, because there will be no true good judgement outside of the ideal state.

Reverence and self-knowledge. The stage tyrants of ancient tragedy are frequently shown as having bad judgement; luckily for their cities, their failures are harmful mainly for themselves. Their bad judgement in many scenes consists in their refusal to accept advice. Stage tyrants are confident that they know best, and so they do not listen. Oedipus will not listen to Tiresias, and neither will Pentheus in the *Bacchae* or Creon in *Antigone*. Well, no one listens to Tiresias in tragedy, but these leaders do not listen to anyone else either.

Bad judgement is a symptom of *hubris*; we see it in stage tyrants who forget their human weakness and place too much confidence in their own knowledge. The pattern in tragedy suggests that good judgement is neither

⁶ On the translation of this difficult passage in Thucydides, see Woodruff 1993, 27–28, with notes.

knowledge nor good order, but something else—the kind of self-knowledge that recognizes human ignorance. In this respect Socrates and Protagoras reflect the culture that generated Athenian tragedy. But the tragic poets tend to characterize this antidote to *hubris* as reverence, which has a small role in Socrates' thinking. Its role in Protagoras' thought is open to debate.⁷

Consultation. In the *Antigone*, Creon does eventually listen twice to his council of elders—the Chorus—(εὖ γὰρ οὖν λέγεις, *Soph. Ant.* 771 and εὐβουλίας δεῖ, *ibid.* 1098) and then his judgement improves. Tragic plots often imply that good judgement is democratic⁸ in the sense that it requires leaders to pay attention to what ordinary people think. But what could that have to do with good judgement? If the people are ignorant (as most tyrants assume), why should leaders listen to them? Far better for a leader to make decisions on his own and then, if necessary, deceive the people into accepting those decisions. Here there might be a role for clever speaking—but only, on this view, if the leader already has knowledge that he can impart to the people. But this would bring us back to the Platonic account.

Reasoning without knowledge. If ordinary people can improve a leader's judgement, then good judgement cannot simply depend on knowledge. This should be no surprise: judgement is generally supposed to operate outside the sphere of knowledge. Although Plato's *Republic* defines good judgement as (a type of) knowledge (428 B 7–8, see above), the tendency of ancient Greek culture runs the other way: good judgement is a virtue we are called upon to exercise precisely in those cases in which we do not have complete knowledge.⁹ For example, no one can know exactly how a war will turn out, but the Spartan king Archidamus was wise enough to make an excellent

⁷ Three ancient Greek words with overlapping meanings all allow the translation “reverence”: αἰδώς, εὐσέβεια, and ὄσιον. I have written about this in Woodruff 2001. I note that Protagoras gives reverence equal status with justice in his famous myth (*Plato, Prot.* 322 C 2), but Plato evidently shifts the discussion in the *logos* section from reverence to soundmindedness (σωφροσύνη—323 A 2).

⁸ Compare Beresford, 139 ff. in this volume.

⁹ See *Isocr.* 15.271 (*Antidosis*) ἐπειδὴ γὰρ οὐκ ἔνεστιν ἐν τῇ φύσει τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιστήμην λαβεῖν, ἣν ἔχοντες ἂν εἰδείμεν ὅτι πρακτέον ἢ λεκτέον ἐστίν. Paul Demont has shown me that the Hippocratic medical writers, who attribute their success to knowledge (usually in the form of *technê*), do not mention good judgement. On Aristotle's distinction between knowledge and *euboulia* (which is nevertheless a form of correctness), see *Arist. EN* 1141 b 2–3, 8–14, 1142 a 32–1142 b 2, and below in this paper. The Stoics are, like Plato, an exception. They define *euboulia* as knowledge of what sorts of things to do and how to do them in order to act advantageously; see *Stob. Anth.* 2.60.24–25, Chrysippus *SVF* III.64.25–26.

prediction for the war between Athens and Sparta: “We will bequeath this war as a legacy to our children” (Thuc. 1.81.6), he said, and we—we who come after him—know that he was right, but he could not have *known* that he was right at the time he said this. How could he know that twenty years after he spoke those words, the equilibrium of power between Athens and Sparta would still hold, and that the war would grind on seven years after the balance shifted to Sparta? Who could know such a thing, aside from the gods? Gods see into the future, ancient Greeks believe, but not humans. One reason Archidamus counsels against war is that the course of war cannot be predicted with knowledge (Thuc. 1.82.6).

Good judgement, then, is the virtue that helps us to deliberate well in the absence of knowledge. If we did have an expert who could reliably predict the war’s outcome, then we would not need good judgement. That’s how it is with my computer: when I want to know how to heal it, I do not use good judgement; instead, I ask an expert and then I do what she says. In such a case—what Plato would call a case of *technê*—we have no need for deliberation or consultation. And consequently we would not need the virtue that helps us deliberate well: we would not need *euboulia*. *Euboulia* and *technê* operate in separate spheres.

If good judgement operates only without knowledge, however, what could a teacher offer us? Teachers give us knowledge—or so Plato would have us think; he defines ‘teaching’ to entail that result. Expert cobblers can teach their apprentices that a certain kind of leather will last through certain ordeals; they know that and can pass the knowledge along. But there is no one to teach a statesman that the war with Sparta will drag on for 27 years, because as Archidamus rightly points out on the basis of his experience, war is unpredictable (Thuc. 1.82.6). Good judgement is not a product of the sort of knowledge that can be simply taught and learned. Experts on war are notorious for learning the wrong lessons from the past; generalizations about war may be well supported and still be amply defeasible, as we shall see.

Prudence. *Euboulia* is often rightly translated “prudence”, meaning the ability to see where one’s own interest lies. So, for example, in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, Hermes and the Chorus both advise Prometheus to be prudent and yield (PV 1033–1035 and 1037–1038); in Euripides’ *Children of Herakles*, the Argive herald urges the chorus to take a godless action—releasing suppliants to their death—on grounds of *euboulia* (*Heracl.* 109–110).

Phronesis. In Aristotle, *euboulia* is the virtue of good judgement as carried out by people who are *phronimoi* (EN 6.9). As a virtue of deliberation, which

is a kind of seeking, *euboulia* is not a form of knowledge (*episteme*), according to Aristotle. It is, however, a form of correctness:

[6]

εἰ δὴ τῶν φρονίμων τὸ εὖ βεβουλευῆσθαι, ἡ εὐβουλία εἴη ἂν ὁρθότης ἢ κατὰ τὸ συμφέρον πρὸς τὸ τέλος, οὐ ἡ φρόνησις ἀληθὴς ὑπόληψις ἐστίν.

Since having deliberated well belongs to people who are prudent, good judgement will be correctness with regard to what is conducive to the goal, and prudence is a true apprehension of that. Arist. *EN* 1142 b 31–33

Phronesis is not the only capacity that apprehends truth without being knowledge; perception has the same feature, and, indeed, *phronesis* is a kind of perception (*EN* 1142 a 23–30).

Notice that the correctness by definition of *euboulia* according to Aristotle concerns what conduces to the end, i.e., the good. Such correctness does not apply to predictions about the future. We need to make an important distinction in evaluating good judgement. Consider again the case of Archidamus (Thucydides 1.81.6). His prediction turned out to be correct, but it might not have. Suppose the Spartans were amazingly lucky: the Persian king would supply them with an immense navy immediately, and with this they would defeat Athens in two years. Looking back from this scenario onto the debate at Sparta, we should still say that Archidamus' judgement was good: the Spartans would have been highly imprudent to launch a war in which only amazing good luck could bring quick victory. On this scenario, Archidamus would have been correct with regard to the good, although incorrect about the future. His good judgement, however, depended on his correct estimate of what was likely to happen in this war. Had it not been highly likely that the war would have been long, his judgement would have been bad, regardless of what actually came about. Correctness about the good does not entail correctness about the future. About the future, the best we can do is use good judgement to assess what is likely. Aristotle does not make this point, but his account of *euboulia* is compatible with it.

Lucky guesses. If Protagorean education is indeed the source of good judgement, then it is not about knowledge in the strict sense: neither the teachers nor the students of *euboulia* will be able to pass a Platonic test for knowledge. So perhaps good judgement is the ability to make lucky guesses, and Protagoras offers to turn his students into makers of lucky guesses. But how could any sort of education make a student lucky?

Plato's Socrates generally holds that anyone who succeeds without the knowledge given by expert knowledge (*technê*) is merely lucky and can take no credit for success. Success aside from knowledge, he assumes again and

again, is a gift of the gods, a kind of luck.¹⁰ Socrates is shown making such an inference in a dialogue wrongly attributed to Plato, the *Sisyphus*.¹¹ There he supposes that if deliberation leading to judgement (τὸ βουλευέσθαι) is without knowledge, then, either he does not know what it is, or it is “saying whatever comes into [your] head, just like people who play odds-and-evens; they have no idea, of course, whether they are holding an even or an odd number of things in their hands ...”.¹² Real life, however, often presents us with choices we can make well or badly in the absence of all the relevant knowledge. Archidamus can consistently remind us that the future in war is unknowable (Thucydides 1.82.6) and exercise good judgement in predicting that this war will continue a long time (1.81.6). Socrates would be unable to say what it is that Archidamus did, because his theory leaves no room between knowledge and guesswork. But Thucydides invites us to evaluate Archidamus’ judgement as good—even before we could know that his prediction is on target. What, then, is good judgement, if it falls between knowledge and guesswork?

Seeking what is most likely. Sisyphus contends that judgement involves both knowledge and ignorance ([Plato] *Sis.* 388 B 1–C 1). This seems plausible for decisions of the kind we are discussing; Archidamus’ case illustrates it perfectly; he has a great deal of knowledge about war in general, but he has ignorance of the future. This combination of knowledge and ignorance produces a judgement as to what is likely (*eikos*). Plato’s Socrates refuses to accept the likely; he is interested only in the truth, unlike the orators who follow the teaching of Tisias (*Phaedrus* 272 D 4–273 A 1, in context). In the *Sisyphus*, he concludes, “Since nobody can hit on what’s in the future, no human being can actually be good or bad at deliberation (οὐτ’ εὐβουλος οὔτε κακόβουλος)” (391 C 4–6)—just as no one can be good or bad at making lucky guesses.

Did Archidamus in fact merely make a lucky guess? As we have seen, the future could have turned out differently, if Persia had intervened earlier, or if either side had deviated from its usual practices. But Archidamus’ judgement was good because the Persian king was likely to have other concerns, and

¹⁰ A clear example of this strategy is the main argument of the *Ion* (see its conclusion, 542 A 2–B 4). For Aristotle’s distinction between *euboulia* and lucky guessing (*eustochia*) see *EN* 1142 b 2–4: guessing is too fast to involve deliberation, and *euboulia* is a virtue of deliberation.

¹¹ Although probably not by Plato, the dialogue does appear to come from the fourth century (in which it is clearly and anachronistically set), and its representation of Socrates is consistent with Plato’s.

¹² [Plato] *Sis.* 387 E 3–6, translated by David Gallop.

because both sides were likely to avoid the kind of combat in which they had not excelled in the past, and so they would probably not come to a decisive battle for many years.

This brings us to the heart of the debate about good judgement. It operates on the basis of what is likely—with what it is reasonable in the circumstances to expect. Protagoras, as a teacher of the art of speaking, must have taught his students how to say what is likely or reasonable to expect. That will be the main historical hypothesis of this paper.¹³

3. REASONABLE EXPECTATION (*EIKOS*)¹⁴

Socrates willfully misunderstands the issue in the *Sisyphus* and also in the Platonic corpus. Good judgement relies not on luck, but on something his contemporaries call *eikos*—reasonable expectation. The Latin translations of *eikos* are *probabile* and *veri simile*, ‘credible’ and ‘similar to the truth’, and the Greek seems to have carried both meanings. Modern translations follow the Latin, so you will almost always find the Greek word *eikos* translated in terms of probability. And this plays modern readers into Socrates’ hands. If predicting the outcome of a particular war is merely a matter of probability, such as calling the toss of a coin, then education will be of no use in deliberating on the matter. We would do better to toss a coin or consult an oracle than to listen to a wise old general such as Archidamus. But this cannot be right.

Socrates fails to make a crucial distinction, and this is obscured by the usual translation of *eikos* as ‘probability’. Random probability is one thing, reasonable expectation is another. To see this, consider the coin toss. It does not matter what sample of coin tosses you take (so long as the tosser is using a fair coin), or where you toss the coin, or who tosses it. The probability is always the same. It is distributed evenly over any sample. But suppose that battles of a certain kind have been won by our side exactly half the time. Is our probability of winning the next battle perfectly even—as it would be if

¹³ We have no evidence that Protagoras explicitly claimed to teach his students to use *eikos* in argument, but he could not have taught them to argue persuasively on both sides of most issues on the basis of knowledge, as one side in a debate at least must be making a false claim, and only *eikos* argument could make such a claim plausible. In real situations calling for judgement, we are often without knowledge, so that we need in such cases to consider *eikos* arguments on both sides in order to make a wise decision.

¹⁴ This section is based on, and quotes from Woodruff 1999.

we were tossing coins with the enemy? Surely we cannot say that our chances are even on the basis of equal histories of victory and defeat.

In the domain of good judgement, what sample you take may make all the difference. No two battles are as alike as two coin-tosses. There are many questions you must ask and answer before you could reasonably expect that the outcome of a given battle would be like that of a coin-toss: Are the two sides evenly matched in personnel and equipment? Do they hold equal ground? What about leadership, morale? These are only the most obvious questions to ask. Suppose, that, after I have answered them, I conclude that it is reasonable to treat the battle like a coin-toss, and I hedge my bets accordingly. Then I discover that one army has formed the same expectation as I have, while the other has been convinced that it will win. This changes the odds once more: the army with the ungrounded expectations may be more likely to lose, if it is badly led into foolishly optimistic maneuvers; alternatively, it may be more likely to win: if it is well led, its greater confidence will give it the edge. Now I must ask further questions and change my bets once again.

Such reasoning is known to logic as defeasible,¹⁵ because it proceeds from generalizations that hold broadly but not uniformly over a large sample, but may be defeated in specific cases. Good judgement is the ability to negotiate defeasible argument well in practical affairs, and so to arrive at the most reasonable expectation relative to the knowledge available. That, I believe, is what the ancient Greeks meant by the term, because that explains the value of consultation and debate.

The good deliberator knows that a certain generalization holds defeasibly (for example, that the larger army usually wins); he knows some of the potential defeaters for that generalization (for example, that the larger army will not win if it is badly led); and he knows some of the facts needed for testing his generalization against the defeaters (for example, that the army is larger and better led). All this knowledge goes into good judgement.

But there is much that is not known. Even the best deliberator will not know all the potential defeaters for a generalization, and she may also not know all the facts she needs to test a conclusion against the defeaters she does know. That is why a good deliberator will say of her conclusion, "this is the most reasonable expectation in the circumstances, relative to what I know at this time." A fully defeasible argument leads to a defeasible conclusion.

¹⁵ On defeasible inference I am indebted especially to Robert Causey. See Causey 1991.

A fully defeasible argument in my sense *must* lead to a defeasible conclusion, because the decider in such a case cannot know whether she has tested her conclusion against every possible circumstance that might defeat it. If she knew enough to draw an infallible conclusion, she would be exercising knowledge, rather than good judgement, and her conclusion would not itself be defeasible (though her argument could be called so in an interestingly limited sense).¹⁶

Not all conclusions about such matters are defeasible. The battle case could be otherwise. Suppose I did know *all* the potential defeaters, and all the relevant facts. Then I could draw a clear inference: from these facts, we can predict this outcome, simply and infallibly. For example, if we have only archers who are unarmed except for their bows, and who have expended their arrows, and if we could be certain that nothing will happen to give us an advantage—no intervention by the gods or sudden earthquake—then we could be certain that we would be defeated if we went into battle against a foe that is properly armed, equipped, and led. That is not a defeasible argument, and its conclusion is not defeasible. The ancient Greeks would say that such reasoning is a product of some combination of military and prophetic *technê*. If there are such *technai*, then there are such cases, in which experts could be said to know the outcome in advance. Apparently, however, there are not.

4. THE TWO-*LOGOI* DOCTRINE

An interesting feature of defeasible reasoning is that it can lead to opposite conclusions that are equally reasonable. Before the battle in the Great Harbor at Syracuse, the two commanders speak to their troops, giving the reasons why they expect to win. The purpose of the speeches is to raise morale, but, as Thucydides represents them, their content is solid. Both sides have good reason to believe they will win. And the battle turns out to be as well balanced as the arguments; the battle will go on for a long time, and when it turns, in the end, it seems to turn as a result of accident. This outcome does not support the argument of Socrates in the *Sisyphus*; the issue is not a coin-toss. The generals did know enough to make reasonable predictions, and they

¹⁶ Some logicians call arguments defeasible even when the conclusions are shown to be non-defeasible, through the exclusion of all potential defeaters. This usage is not relevant to practical deliberation.

were both right—for most of the battle. But they could have been wrong and still reasonable.¹⁷ You and I can disagree, and both be reasonable, although one of us is later found to have been wrong.

In many cases, we find good arguments on both sides. For every fully defeasible argument there is a reasonable counter argument, although the two may not be equally reasonable. Protagoras probably taught his students how to make good arguments on both sides of any issue:

[7]

a. *Protagoras ait de omni re in utramque partem disputari posse ex aequo et de hac ipsa, an omnis res in utramque partem disputabilis sit.*

Protagoras says it is possible to dispute about everything on either side equally and about this very thing, if everything is disputable on either side.

Sen. *Ep.* 88.43 (DK 80 A 20, II.260.2–4)

b. καὶ πρῶτος ἔφη δύο λόγους εἶναι περὶ πάντος πράγματος ἀντικειμένους ἀλλήλοις· (...).

He was first to say that there are two *logoi* opposed to one another on every matter.

DL 9.51 (DK 80 B 6a, II.266.13–14)

c. ... "Ἕλληνές φασι Πρωταγόρου προκατάρξαντος παντὶ λόγῳ λόγον ἀντικείμεναι, (...).

... the Greeks say—Protagoras having been the first to do so—that to every *logos* a *logos* is opposed, (...).

Clemens Alex. *Strom.* 6.8.65.1 (DK 80 A 20, II.260, 1–2)

d. ... Πρωταγόρας, ὃν Εὐδόξος ἱστορεῖ τὸν ἥσσω καὶ κρείσσω λόγον πεποιηκέναι καὶ τοὺς μαθητάς δεδιδαχέναι τὸν αὐτὸν ψέγειν καὶ ἐπαινεῖν.

Protagoras, of whom Eudoxus records that he invented the worse and the better *logos* and taught his pupils to blame and praise the same person.

Eudoxus fr. 307 Lasserre = Stephanus Byzantius

Ethnica s.v. "Ἀβδηρα 1.18.13–15 Billerbeck (DK 80 A 21, II.260.9–11)

Our sources are not clear on a crucial point: Did Protagoras teach (A) that opposed arguments are equally strong on any issue? Or only (B) that there are opposing arguments to be made on every issue? The second position is true of any issue that is subject to *eikos* argument. For the war with Athens,

¹⁷ Failure in Iraq will not show by itself that the United States were badly led in the decision to make war; to make that verdict we need to ask first what was reasonable to expect from war on the basis of what was known in 2002 and 2003.

the Spartans had reason to think they could win quickly (after all they had beaten even the Persians); but they also had reasons to think the war would be prolonged (the Athenians had the best navy).

Opposed arguments. The value of opposed arguments in this arena is clear. For every defeasible generalization there is at least one opposed argument—what I have called a defeater. Decisions are hard to make because we do not know how many potential defeaters there are. For example, Athens had good reason to expect Syracuse to surrender if besieged; Athenian sieges had always succeeded in the end. But there are many possible scenarios in which this expectation would be defeated. In their haste to decide for war, the Athenians cut short debate by frightening the peace party into silence (in most cases) and into a dishonest debating strategy (in the case of Nicias). The result was that the Assembly did not fully consider the case.

Good Judgement Through Debate. The best judgement Athens could have made about war with Syracuse would have allowed for full adversary debate, with no intimidation of the peace party. Then the peace party would have had ample opportunity to bring up potential defeaters for the war party's case. Had Protagoras been coaching the peace party, Athens might have been saved. The peace advocates would have made their case as strongly as it could be made, and the argument that was weaker when actually presented to the Assembly could have been the stronger one. Making the weaker argument stronger could have saved Athens from disaster. And Protagoras' teaching would deserve the credit.

This then is my reconstruction of Protagoras' teaching. Good judgement does depend on the art of speaking well—but *not* on the art of winning debates no matter how bad your case is. Good judgement depends on being able to identify and present plausibly the reasons on either side of a debate. Decision-makers who listen carefully to both sides of a well-made adversary debate on public matters will be well equipped to evaluate both sides and come to a reasonable conclusion. On private matters, decision-makers would have to rehearse arguments on both sides for themselves. Either way, however, the key to good judgement is the ability to strengthen the argument that at first sight seemed to be the weaker one. Until that is strengthened, the side that at first was winning will not have been adequately tested.

My proposal is speculative, but it is a reasonable one. On this hypothesis we can explain how Protagoras could claim to enhance good judgement by teaching the art of speaking. Good debates by themselves do not make for good judgement; we need to learn to listen to each other and to weigh competing arguments in reasonable ways. Athenian tragic poets understood

this very well, and so probably did Protagoras. If he really set out to teach *euboulia*, he must have set out to teach not only the art of opposing argument with argument, but the virtue that would make debates worthwhile.¹⁸

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¹⁸ For this point I am grateful to Adam Beresford and to Michael Mendelson, participants in the conference at Leiden.

CHAPTER TEN

PRIVATISING PERCEPTION: PLATO'S PROTAGOREANISM (*THEAETETUS* 154 B–157 C)*

Arnaud Macé

In *Theaetetus* 154 B–157 C, Plato presents an inspired theory of change based on a radical ontology of action. This theory is meant to be compatible with the view that each perception is both true, absolutely private, and particular to the encounter of the perceiver and the perceived, with no sensible quality which survives the moment of interaction or is shared with another perceiver. It is most likely that Plato did not endorse this theory, but developed it as a thought experiment to see how far one could follow an idea, namely the idea attributed to Protagoras that all appearances are true. This thought experiment is textually prompted by recurring interventions of Protagoras, who turns into a character in his own right as the passage unfolds. This article is about both Plato and Protagoras: it is at once concerned with the meaning of this experiment for Plato's own philosophy and with its value as a testimony about Protagoras. My aim is to grant more credit to Plato on both grounds: we could use more of Plato as evidence about Protagoras, because his most fictitious creations are not devoid of historical significance; and we should acknowledge how Plato plays with his predecessors' theories, constructing them, taking them beyond their original scope, exhausting their possibilities, and then deconstructing them again—before choosing, most often, an alternative path. In the present case, we might see that the so-called Platonic Heracliteanism, if one means thereby the possibility for Plato to understand variations of appearances as some kind of change,¹ actually is

* I would like to give my warmest thanks to the editors of this volume for their commitment to making my expression and ideas clearer. My shortcomings would also have weighed more on the result without the help of Francisco Gonzalez, Luc Macé-Malaurie and Denis O'Brien, whom I would like to include in my grateful acknowledgements.

¹ In order to support the view that Aristotle's testimony (for instance in *Metaphysics* 987 a 32–b 7) on the origins of the doctrine of Platonic Forms is correct, Irwin argues that Plato's understanding of flux includes not only change over time but also what the author calls 'aspect change': "x a-changes iff x is F in one aspect, not-F in another, and x is in the same

Plato's Protagoreanism, which he took over only on this very special occasion, when he brought the sophist from Abdera on the stage of ontology and theory of motion.

Plato is one of our main and oldest sources for the knowledge of his predecessors. He also is a very tricky one on account of the specific literary form in which he wrote philosophy.² Creating characters out of his contemporaries is not the least of the ambiguous traits characteristic of his particular rhetorical style. Plato has vividly given life to all the main sophists, Gorgias, Hippias, Thrasymachus and Protagoras. As a result, we actually get a very rich intellectual and moral portrait of each of these key intellectual figures of the time. The question, however, is how faithful these creative portraits were to the actual historical figures they were based upon. It has often been noted that there would be no point for Plato in drawing these characters, if they did not somehow resemble the original ones, whom his readers might have had the chance to know either directly or from the many other sources available at the time. For this reason we should not indeed withdraw from the task of probing Plato's literary fictions as a historical source, in spite of all the liberty he takes in his portraits. That it is difficult to decipher the historical reality behind the character is most true of Plato's testimony concerning Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*, if we exclude the one passage that remains one of the very few acknowledged fragments of the Abderite's work.³ It has long been noted, that Socrates' development (151 D 7–160 E 4) and refutation (160 E 5–186 E 12) of the Protagorean definition of knowledge by Theaetetus is abnormally long for a refutation: rather than simply examining the very thesis of his interlocutor, Socrates turns it into a metaphysical system of its own,⁴ in which Theaete-

condition when it is F and when it is not-F", 1977, 4. Others call this phenomenon 'Cambridge change' after Geach 1969, 71; see for instance Fine, 1996, 115 n. 22—and also Van Eck in this volume—, but I call it only variation of appearances, and not change, for I hold the view that Plato never took it for change, except in a very special context where he carefully built up all the steps needed to arrive at such a strange idea as that a variation of appearances might be an actual change: this context is precisely the thought experiment I am looking at in the present article, the one conducted by the character Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*.

² Concerning the difficult question of Plato as a source for the knowledge of the Presocratics, see for instance the volume edited by Dixsaut and Brancacci, 2002, and the bibliography collected for that volume by Luc Brisson, in collaboration with Benoît Castelnérac. For the matter at hand, see especially the Plato and Protagoras section, 228–230.

³ *Tht.* 151 E 8–152 C 3, DK 80 B 1, II.263.6–264.2 (and perhaps also 161 C 2–D 1, added by Diels to B 1 because it yields the title of Protagoras' book, *Truth*).

⁴ For such a diagnosis see for instance Vlastos 1991, 266. Although Vlastos bases his view on his own large scale hypothesis regarding Plato's development, a hypothesis with

tus' original thesis becomes difficult to isolate. As a result, the attempt to identify vestiges of an original Protagorean doctrine in anything to which Theaetetus commits himself in these pages seems unreasonable. This part of the *Theaetetus*, however much it draws on Protagoras, seems unfit to serve as a proper source for the study of the sophist's own doctrines in any way beyond the formula that provides the opportunity for its starting point.

However typically Platonic the whole construction may appear, we are still not relieved of the historical question: why would Plato develop this theory at such length and present it in connection with the name of Protagoras? Why would he, at various stages of this lengthy passage, appeal to Protagoras himself; make a character out of him; make him react to the issue at hand and thereby prompt new developments? The construction achieved by Plato on the basis of the definition of knowledge and reality attributed to Protagoras is quite a unique example in the history of philosophy: the development, in the name of a predecessor, of an original theory ready to live its own life, a theory that might have had philosophical effects of its own. If we reject this part of the *Theaetetus* as a direct historical source for the doctrines of Protagoras (i.e., as material from which fragments may be extracted), it still may be viewed as the strongest historical testimony concerning the philosophical effect of Protagoras on Plato. That is to say, we do not gain direct access to the original work, but rather a factual assessment of the philosophical influence of Protagoras, by observing how far Plato is led by following what he perceived to be Protagoras' views—and this is, maybe, not the least important kind of testimony historians of philosophy might want to examine.⁵

This perspective might be stimulating: the path leading towards it, however, is not without many obstacles. One first has to find out how exactly and where in this passage Plato invokes the figure of Protagoras, what part the character plays (problem 1). Once that is done, four more tasks would be waiting to determine the philosophical effects of the historical Protagoras on Plato: to find out what the general philosophical significance is for Plato of

too large a scope to be adopted within the more limited framework of our discussion, his way of reading Plato as a whole enables him to describe all the more strikingly this particular aspect of refutation in the *Theaetetus*, which consists more in the creative and speculative elaboration of the 'Platonic' mind than in the sobriety of the 'Socratic' *elenchos*.

⁵ For a reading of Plato's portrait of Thrasymachus with a similar strategy, see Macé 2008.

the part played by Protagoras in this passage of the *Theaetetus* (problem 2); to assess the compatibility of the perception of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* with the perception of Protagoras in other dialogues (a consistent picture would make the philosophical influence clearer) (problem 3); to compare this picture with the extant fragments of Protagoras and testimonies from other authors outside Plato, in order to measure the specific nature of Plato's perception of Protagoras (problem 4); to prove the relevance of selecting these passages from Plato as testimonies in our editions of Protagoras (problem 5).⁶ Obviously, accomplishing all those tasks goes well beyond the scope of the present article. It is, nonetheless, necessary to state these several connected questions, in order to situate our present examination in its appropriate methodological context, and to determine its ability to contribute to the bigger task, however small its contribution might be.

The object of our present study will be a short passage (154 B–157 C) which is part of *Theaetetus*' first definition—a passage which is at the core of many of the problems referred to above. Here, Plato is building a complex theory on behalf of Protagoras, and understanding what exactly this theory is, and how Protagoras intervenes, has been the crux of many studies from the perspectives of problems (1) and (2) above. At this level, I will offer an original reading of the strategy of this passage and contend—against the common view, according to which Plato says that Protagoras' epistemology needs a Heraclitean ontology—that Plato here is trying to show the potential effects of Protagoras' epistemology on a theory of motion, that is, on cosmology. Plato is elaborating upon Protagoras to show what would happen if the whole world worked in a Protagorean way; therefore he does not actually attribute to Protagoras a cosmology, but is rather developing the cosmological consequences of a Protagorean view. In addition I will put forth a hypothesis concerning the comparison with Plato's picture of Protagoras elsewhere in his work (problem 3), and while leaving out the question of the consistency of the overall picture (problem 4), I will attempt to offer for discussion what this means for our handling of the *Theaetetus* as a source for Protagoras (problem 5) and as evidence of the sophist's philosophical impact on Plato (problem 2).

⁶ For a similar way of taking into account the assessment of the philosophical effect of a sophist on Plato in the task of selecting and interpreting testimonies about a particular sophist, see our translation of the fragments and testimonies of Thrasymachus, Macé 2009, following Macé 2008.

1. HOW PROTAGORAS WILL MAKE US WONDER ABOUT PERCEPTION AND CHANGE

There is something odd about the way in which we use this part of the *Theaetetus* as a source of testimonies and fragments to nourish a chapter on Protagoras in our editions of the ancient sophists. We seem to be using either too much or too little of the text. Diels puts 151 E 8–152 C 3 and 161 C 2–D 1 in the section of fragments (B 1), since both passages actually provide quotes.⁷ He also selects 162 D 5–E 2 and puts it in the section of the testimonies (A 23) as being part of a different quote: this time the quote is not presented by Socrates as a genuine one, but Socrates utters the speech that he thinks Protagoras or someone else on his behalf (ἢ τις ἄλλος ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ) might make in such a circumstance.⁸ The fact that Socrates refers to Protagoras and others who speak on his behalf, is a clear sign that Plato does not intend to refer to any specific words written by Protagoras and therefore seems a plausible enough reason for Diels not to accept this text as a fragment. But then, what is the reason for accepting as a testimony only one such passage? As a matter of fact, this way of making Protagoras' voice a collective one is systematically used throughout this section of the dialogue: in 154 B 6–9, again in 154 C 7–9 and again in 162 D 5–E 2—the last passage being the only one chosen as a testimony by Diels. There are indeed some good reasons to keep 162 D 5–E 2, because the opinion about the gods it expresses is also to be found in testimonies outside Plato. However, we still need to wonder why Protagoras' voice is made into a collective one, in order to get a better idea of the status of these three collective apparitions of Protagoras.

This phenomenon finds its origins in 152 C 8–10, where Socrates says not only that the formulae given at 152 A and commented upon throughout A, B and C (that man is the measure of the being and non-being of all things, and that things are just as we perceive them) constitute Protagoras' *exoteric* doctrine, but also that he exposed to his pupils (τοῖς μαθηταῖς)⁹ an *esoteric* one, a true one, presented from 152 D 2 to 153 D 7 according to which motion is the cause (i) of all being and (ii) of the fact that nothing is something by itself, for instance, tall or big, because that might appear differently to

⁷ *Tht.* 152 A 2–4 φησὶ γάρ που “πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον” ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, “τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν.”; 161 C 3–6 τὴν δ' ἀρχὴν τοῦ λόγου τεθαύμακα, ὅτι οὐκ εἶπεν ἀρχόμενος τῆς Ἀληθείας ὅτι “πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ὅς” ἢ “κυνοκέφαλος” ἢ τι ἄλλο ἀτοπώτερον τῶν ἐχόντων αἰσθῆσιν (...).

⁸ *Tht.* 162 D 4–163 A 1.

⁹ *Tht.* 152 C 10.

another person: “nothing *is* indeed anything: it *is* in a constant *becoming* (ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὐδέποτε οὐδέν, ἀεὶ δὲ γίγνεται).”¹⁰ Socrates goes on to explain how motion creates everything, as all the wise men since Homer have said—with the notable exception of Parmenides. There is a playful trick in the pseudo-disclosure of an esoteric doctrine comprising everything all the wise men have been publicly saying—the Panheracliteanism of the *Cratylus*¹¹—, and there is, of course, no reason why we should consider these passages as the exposition of a genuinely Protagorean doctrine.

There is much debate among scholars about how exactly a Protagorean epistemology relates to such a theory of motion.¹² Let us state only what we read so far: Socrates clearly says that constant change guarantees that nothing is itself or, to put it differently, that appearances are constantly different to everyone—because things always change: what we call big will appear small, because it did become smaller, something light will appear to be heavy, because it did become heavier. So Socrates is saying that variation of appearance is an example of constant change.¹³ Now, this is most strange. None, or very few of these wise men, if they were to accept that everything

¹⁰ *Tht.* 152 E 1.

¹¹ See *Crat.* 401 B 7–402 D 3.

¹² The crux of the matter is whether one does believe that Plato accepts as true of the sensible (world) the Heraclitean doctrine presented here, or that this Heracliteanism is only appealed to in support of a Protagorean epistemology that Plato will reject; see Burnyeat 1990, who in his commentary systematically describes the opposition of these two readings. The first view, supported by classical studies of the passage (such as Cornford 1935; Moreau 1955; Nakhnikian 1955–1956 and 1956–1957) confirms Aristotle’s assertion that Plato, subscribing to the perpetual flux of the sensibles, had to posit permanent Forms as distinct from the sensibles (even if, as is the case for Moreau on his neo-Kantian view, one does not believe that Plato sets up real entities beyond the sensible). In support of the view that the Heraclitean ontology is presented only as something that Theaetetus and Protagoras would be committed to, see Fine 1996, 108–109, and, for more arguments against the idea that Plato might be putting forward as his own view the theory of perception presented in *Theaetetus* 152–183, see more recently Day 1997 and Macé 2006, both using the argument that the view on perception presented here is in some way inseparable from the flux doctrine of *Theaetetus* 181 B 8–183 C 3 and therefore refuted.

¹³ This is a unique idea in Plato’s dialogues and this passage is actually the only direct evidence produced by Irwin to support his view that “compresence of opposites” is a “clear example of flux” for Plato, evidence of the fact that Plato “does not find it odd to talk of a[spect]-change as a kind of flux” (Irwin 1977, 5). The three other passages appealed to by Irwin (*ibid.*) are only evidence that Plato attributes unity of opposites to Heraclitus (Irwin’s evidence 1 and 2), or that Plato might describe people troubled by variations of appearances as being led to the idea that things change (evidence 3). As a result, evidence 4, our passage, *Tht.* 152 D 2–6, is the only one that seems directly to mention “compresence of opposites as a clear example of flux”. But that evidence is very special, as we will see.

is subjected to some kind of motion, would accept that it ensues from their position that all appearances are different (and true), and that there is nothing beyond these appearances—Heraclitus would certainly not: while both Heraclitus and Plato might agree that this may be true of perception, perception is not the only truth for them.¹⁴ Moreover, the theories of motion presented both in the *Cratylus* 401 B 7–402 D 3 and in the very next lines of the *Theaetetus* to describe a commonly shared Heracliteanism absolutely do not presuppose that all appearances are true and do not imply such an extreme view of flux. The common Heracliteanism that is at stake here, is about believing that all things come to be and perish—that all things that are, are in motion, and that nothing is at rest¹⁵—or that motion is the cause of the generation of all things and of their dispositions, and rest the cause of their corruption.¹⁶ At no point does the belief that all things come to be and perish imply that they cannot be just what they are for the time they are: the gods were born of Ocean and Tethys, and science came from study, but no one would think that this necessarily implies that science is at the same time wise and not wise. Not to be something by itself because one can appear F and non-F at any time is very different from not being something everlasting. And there is no reason to think this Panheraclitean tradition identifies the two.

We get an important clue here: we should not take at face value the ironic presentation of the support that all Greek wise men are supposed to give Protagoras. As the following pages will make clear, it is a very special theory of motion that would match Protagoras' views: a theory of constant change that would actually be the cause of the variation of appearances, a theory of motion different from the one ascribed here to all Greek wise men. So there is a mystery indeed, and a real initiation is required for those who desire to become followers of Protagoras—the revelation of a new truth about motion.

¹⁴ Here Cornford 1935 points to the “real point of contact between Protagoras, Heraclitus and Plato” (38), and reminds us that Plato uses against the lover of appearances at *Resp.* 479 A ff. the same argument that a beautiful thing will also appear ugly: “Plato makes this ‘blending of opposites’ characteristic of the particular things of sense” (ibid.). But one still has to make a critical distinction between Heraclitus and Plato, on the one hand, and Protagoras, on the other: the fact that the latter states that appearance is true takes his phenomenalism much further than Plato can accept, and also has consequences for the way in which we can describe physical interactions that Plato would not accept for his own physics. For Heraclitus' mistrust of perception, see, among other examples, DK 22 B 56, l.163.10–14.

¹⁵ *Crat.* 401 D 5 τὰ ὄντα ἰέναι τε πάντα καὶ μένειν οὐδέν.

¹⁶ *Tht.* 152 E 1–153 D 7. For a description of the type of theory of motion attributed here as a common ground to all Greek wise men, see Macé 2006, 109–112.

Protagoras and his followers are going to lead us towards it. In order to do so, however, Protagoras (I am now referring to the character in the *Theaetetus*) will have to let us see more of the possible connection between a very original theory of motion and an ontology in which nothing has a determinate quality. From 153 D 8 onwards, Socrates—repeatedly invoking Protagoras—attempts to state this connection more precisely. In order to assess Plato's testimony concerning Protagoras in this passage, we will carefully follow the steps of this much-discussed argument, and describe in detail every conceptual move made by Socrates. Two premises are first established, then a dilemma is set, with the help of Protagoras.

(i). *The Absence of Location* (153 D 8–E 3)

From the ontology according to which nothing is something by itself, Socrates deduces the negation of any location (χώρα) for sensible qualities, explaining that a 'place' is where something would stay in place and remain at rest (ἐν τάξει καὶ μένον). Absence of location (being neither 'outside' the eyes nor 'in' them: μὴ εἶναι αὐτὸ ἕτερόν τι ἔξω τῶν σῶν ὁμμάτων μῆδ' ἐν τοῖς ὀμμασι), therefore, is the condition for being in a state of coming to be (ἐν γένεσει).

(ii). *The Principle of Privatisation* (153 E 4–154 A 9)

Socrates separately concludes from the same ontology applied to perception that each of the perceived properties is "something that has come into being in the middle, something peculiar to each one (μεταξύ τι ἐκάστω ἴδιον γεγονός)".¹⁷ There has been much debate about what to call the doctrine being crafted here: relativism, infallibilism.¹⁸

With Cornford, I would rather stick to the words used by Plato, according to which every act of perception is now something peculiar to each one, that is, something 'private', ἴδιον.¹⁹ If one were to label this view, it might be called perceptual 'privatism', according to which each sensible quality perceived has become something private to each of us perceiving, and furthermore, as we will learn as our initiation progresses, to each interaction (we will

¹⁷ *Tht.* 154 A 2–3.

¹⁸ For the description in terms of relativism, see Burnyeat 1979, 76–85. This description is challenged by Fine 1996 in the name of 'infallibilism' (126–129). Fine has a point in saying that relativism seems to imply that the reality of things remains the same despite changing appearances. Speaking of Nietzsche, historians of philosophy often use 'perspectivism' to label that kind of radical relativism for which each appearance is true.

¹⁹ Cornford 1935, 40.

also experience that each of our perceptions is isolated, not common to our experience of the same object over time). The concept of *'metaxu'* is used to define this idiosyncrasy of encounters: what is specific to an encounter is said to come to be 'in between' (μεταξύ) the perceiver and the perceived, that is, without being localised in either of them. Absence of location, as introduced by the first premise, is therefore associated with privatisation: what happens 'in between' two things and not 'in' any of them is peculiar to their own relationship.

The principle of privatisation, making all perception unique to each encounter, is thus also established as the reason for the diversity of appearances both to different perceivers and to the same perceiver at different times, but not yet as the ground on which the original Protagorean 'exoteric' formula is true, i.e., that every appearance is true, but only as the reason why every perceiver perceives a *different* thing. However, from this we may already infer that there can be no other truth. If privatisation is radical, there is no further common horizon, no common truth behind the insular acts of perception that are now their very own measure.²⁰

One should not fail to hear the anti-heraclitean turn which Protagoras' doctrine is now taking: this very concept of a 'private' perception does stem from Heraclitus, although in a totally different perspective, since the Ephesian mocked the folly of men following their own private senses and insight without being able to follow the one and only 'common' reason.²¹ There could not be a clearer indication from Plato that his Protagoras has now gone much further than any Heraclitean would. Sticking to this idea of 'privatisation' as opposed to a 'community' of perception will also help us understand the political consequences of this part of the *Theaetetus* (see below).

(iii). *A Dilemma for Those Who Believe in Intrinsic Properties*
(154 B 1–155 E 2)

Socrates turns back to the common belief that things simply are what they are. This is the basis on which Protagoras is going to unsettle the reader's mind, in order to guide him or her into another ontology, inspired by the two first premises. If the 'nothing is something by itself' ontology implies that properties have no location, localised properties might be required for

²⁰ This idea was developed by Taylor 1926, 326. I do not follow Cornford's rejection of Taylor's reading (Cornford 1935, 34 n. 1).

²¹ See Heraclitus DK 22 B 1, L150.3–11; also B 2: τοῦ λόγου δ' ἐόντος ξυνοῦ ζώουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ὡς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν, L151.2–4.

a 'things are something by themselves' ontology. If things were really tall or white, either the thing perceived or the perceiver would be characterized, in itself, by the property. Socrates follows both possible hypotheses for locating the property in one of the two entities participating in the interaction.²² He makes the inference that whatever the location (whether it be in the sense-organ, or in the object perceived), such a counter-theory would entail that the perceived property can only change in a way an internal property would, that is to say if the thing having this property undergoes an actual modification. We are now reaching the very strange idea we have been looking for: that variations in appearances might be based on change. If the object really has the perceived quality each of us sees in it, the only way to explain conflicting perceptions is to posit some change, whether in the object perceived or in the perceiver, in between these various perceptions. Without change, there is no way to explain the difference between both perceptions. At this precise point, Socrates makes the Abderite seize upon his interlocutors and derisively make fun of them:

ἐπεὶ νῦν γε, ὦ φίλε, θαυμαστά τε καὶ γελοῖα εὐχερῶς πως ἀναγκαζόμεθα λέγειν, ὡς φαίη ἂν Πρωταγόρας τε καὶ πᾶς ὁ τὰ αὐτὰ ἐκείνῳ ἐπιχειρῶν λέγειν.

Well now then, my dear, we are easily made to say astonishing and ridiculous things, as Protagoras or anyone who tries to say the same things as he does, would say.

Plato *Tht.* 154 B 6–9

What does Protagoras have to say to the interlocutors who just agreed to the idea that if things are what they are, then what we see of them will only vary if the things perceived or perceivers undergo a real change? If that position seems sound, why would anyone find it silly? The statement that if perceived properties belong to things, any change of perception needs a change in the thing itself, seems actually to be easy to refute. Socrates is about to show Theaetetus two very simple examples, and the dialogues also provide many other examples of things being perceived to be different without actually changing. For instance, Simmias may appear big as compared to Socrates and small as compared to Phaedo, without having changed at all.²³ Or, as Socrates tells us now with a very similar example of three groups of dice²⁴ (a group of four, one of six, and one of twelve), insisting on their respective

²² Burnyeat 1979, 80–85, has described the 'window model' that allows Socrates to imagine that the colour perceived might be in the eye itself.

²³ *Phaedo* 102 B 3–103 A 3; cp. 100 E 5–101 B 3.

²⁴ About this puzzle and the next one, see Bluck 1961.

quantities (intrinsic quantitative properties: six being four plus a half of four, and twelve the double of six): six are more (than four, precisely a half more), and less (than twelve, precisely half of it). Having introduced this example, Socrates invokes Protagoras and his followers again:

ἀν σε Πρωταγόρας ἔρηται ἢ τις ἄλλος· “ὦ Θεαίτητε, ἔσθ’ ὅπως τι μείζον ἢ πλέον γίγνεται ἄλλως ἢ ἀυξηθέν;” τί ἀποκρινῇ;

If Protagoras, or anyone else, was to ask you: “Theaetetus, is there any way for something to become bigger or more numerous than to be augmented?” What would you reply?
Plato *Tht.* 154 C 7–9

Theaetetus replies that there are two possible answers to this question, depending on whether one is replying to the present question (πρὸς τὴν νῦν ἐρώτησιν),²⁵ or to the former (πρὸς τὴν προτέραν).²⁶ To the present question, the answer is no; to the former, it is safer to answer yes. It is clear: if one is thinking about our last conceptual step, where we said that there was no other way to be perceived differently other than to undergo some change, then ‘no’ is the only answer. The six dices will not be more numerous without any more dices joining them. Now, if one remembers the question of conflicting appearances that was dealt with before, then it seems safer to say that one could become bigger independently of any change of one’s intrinsic properties—and the dice now before our eyes are also telling us that the same group of six can look big or small without having changed, depending on the context of comparison. Protagoras is presenting us with a dilemma and the dices are dancing in front of our eyes: we seem to see them as bearers of properties that don’t change without something happening—for instance being four—and we also tend to call them “half” or “double” depending on comparisons, without them having to change at all. And if we believe that such properties are real, we have to admit that they did change—without changing? Protagoras makes us see that our perception is not exactly following the principles we might want to adhere to about real change and becoming. “What principles?”, we might wonder? This is exactly what Socrates is about to clarify. In the following passage Theaetetus and Socrates agree on three principles defining a theory of actual change according to which there could be no coming-into-being without real modifications:

²⁵ *Tht.* 154 C 10–D 1.

²⁶ *Tht.* 154 D 1–2.

- (1) nothing becomes bigger or smaller, either in volume or in number, as long as it remains equal to itself;
- (2) the thing to which nothing is added or from which nothing is subtracted does not grow or decrease but remains equal;
- (3) nothing that did not exist, can come into existence without being born.

What is puzzling is that these principles do hold most of the time. They are the foundation for any consistent theory of real change based on localised properties, effectively attributed to the subjects undergoing change; they are also perfectly compatible with the Panheracliteanism earlier attributed to all Greek wise men—things constantly becoming do constantly undergo these changes. If we think of these examples of sense perception, however, each of these principles seems false: it seems that one can appear bigger without growing, and that new properties therefore can come into existence without even ‘being born’. The principles that seem true about change, seem false where perceived change is concerned. So these three propositions are fighting ‘against themselves’ in our minds (τρία μάχεται αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ ψυχῇ),²⁷ when we think of examples like those dice. This is also true for the new example introduced by Socrates at this point—with an interesting variation, since only one of the items compared undergoes a significant modification. A comparison of sizes between Theaetetus and Socrates over the time of a year reveals the latter to be taller than the former at the beginning of the year and smaller at the end. If Theaetetus has grown in size, Socrates is now what he was not before, without having become it.²⁸ Socrates acknowledges the fact that it is all very confusing and asks Theaetetus if he has understood how this is connected to Protagoras’ doctrines. Theaetetus is not sure if he has clearly understood. To make it clearer Socrates suggests entering deeper into Protagoras’ esoteric doctrine, his “hidden truth”²⁹—apparently referring to the title of Protagoras’ work.

The character of Protagoras is mind-boggling, because he makes us realize that our perception can easily make us confused about the very principles we might hold true about change. He reveals to us something about perception

²⁷ *Tht.* 155 B 5–6. On this expression τρία μάχεται αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς see Igal 1968. The author analyzes some textual problems in this passage, including this expression.

²⁸ *Tht.* 155 B 7–C 4 (...) ἢ ὅταν φῶμεν ἐμὲ τηλικόνδε ὄντα, μήτε αὐξηθέντα μήτε τούναντίον παθόντα, ἐν ἐνιαυτῷ σοῦ τοῦ νέου νῦν μὲν μείζω εἶναι, ὕστερον δὲ ἐλάττω, μηδὲν τοῦ ἐμοῦ ὄγκου ἀφαιρεθέντος ἀλλὰ σοῦ αὐξηθέντος. εἰμὶ γὰρ δὴ ὕστερον ὃ πρότερον οὐκ ἦ, οὐ γενόμενος· ἄνευ γὰρ τοῦ γίνεσθαι γενέσθαι ἀδύνατον, μηδὲν δὲ ἀπολλὺς τοῦ ὄγκου οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἐγινόμην ἐλάττων.

²⁹ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀποκεκρυμμένην, *Tht.* 155 D 10–E 1.

that is actually very worrying, because it unsettles all previous notions of change. A contemporary philosopher has perceived the dangerous and thrilling potential of these puzzles: the idea that there might be some kind of change that could actually take place according to the logic of perception, a 'pure' becoming whereby things become smaller as they grow, become bigger as they diminish—something vertiginous that Gilles Deleuze read in Plato and Lewis Carroll.³⁰ Led by Protagoras' questions, we are about to be initiated into a theory of change that fully endorses the logic of our senses.

2. A NEW TRUTH ABOUT MOTION AND A NEW ONTOLOGY OF ACTION

There is one possible way to recover from the vertigo induced by the previous puzzles: to let go of our previous beliefs and adopt a theory of motion based on the principles of delocalisation and privatisation exposed earlier. We are at the threshold of a new revelation of Protagoras' secrets. It is time to leave the profane behind. Who are the profane? Those who accept as being only the things they can grasp with their hands, while refusing to admit the existence of the actions themselves and the processes of becoming.³¹ We are about to learn, on the contrary, the refined truth that everything is only motion, and this means that everything is action—action itself being viewed on the model of the encounter involved in sense perception, delocalised and private. Let us carefully follow the steps of the demonstration here again:

(i). *A New Cosmology—The Universe Is Motion, That Is Action (156 A 5–B 1)*

The universe is motion and there is nothing else but motion (τὸ πᾶν κίνησις ἦν καὶ ἄλλο παρὰ τοῦτο οὐδέν), divided into two kinds (εἴδη) of infinite number: one with the power of action and another with the power of being acted upon (δύναμιν δὲ τὸ μὲν ποιεῖν ἔχον, τὸ δὲ πάσχειν). Two things are constantly being born from the encounter (the ὁμιλία and τρίψις) of action and passion: the sensible and the sensation (τὸ μὲν αἰσθητόν, τὸ δὲ αἴσθησις). The basic division introduced here may be summed up in the following chart:

³⁰ Deleuze, 1969, 9–12: Alice grows—she becomes bigger than she was and smaller than she will be; becoming goes both ways, according to the point of comparison.

³¹ *Tht.* 155 E 3–7.

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Parents | First type of motion: with the power of acting upon | Second type of motion: with the power of being acted upon |
| Children (ἐκγονα) of their encounter | The object of perception | The action of perceiving |

In 156 B 1–C 3 Socrates names examples of perceptions and objects of perception: nine actions of perceiving (ὄψεις, ἀκοαί, ὀσφρήσεις, ψύξεις, καύσεις, ἡδοναί, λύπαι, ἐπιθυμίαι, φόβοι) and two kinds of objects of perception (χρώματα, φωναί), adding that not all perceptions and perceived objects have names.

(ii). *Variation of Speed Is the Cause of the Difference Between Cause and Effect* (156 C 7–D 3)

There are slow motions producing fast motions:

It actually means that all these things are, as we were saying, in motion (ὥς ταῦτα πάντα μὲν ὥσπερ λέγομεν κινεῖται), and there is swiftness and slowness in their motion (τάχος δὲ καὶ βραδυτῆς ἐν τῇ κινήσει αὐτῶν). Now the slow element keeps its motion in the same place and is directed towards such things as draw near it (ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ πρὸς τὰ πλησιάζοντα τὴν κίνησιν ἴσχει), and indeed it is in this way that it begets (καὶ οὕτω δὴ γεννᾷ). But the things begotten ... in this way are quicker (τὰ δὲ γεννώμενα ... οὕτω δὴ θάττω ἐστίν); for they are carried, and their motion is naturally a translation (φέρεται γὰρ καὶ ἐν φορᾷ αὐτῶν ἢ κινήσιν πέφυκεν).³²

| Rank in causality | Speed | Types of motion involved |
|-------------------|---------------|---|
| Parents | Slow motions | ‘Translation’ in the same place (or close by), carrying, giving birth |
| Children | Swift motions | Being born, being carried, translation |

(iii). *Localised Movers and Delocalised Change* (156 D 3–E 7)

Slow motions do have a location: the condition for the generation of fast motions is that their ‘parents’ find themselves ‘in the vicinity’ of each other. Slow motions must have a location to let happen wandering fast motions between themselves. Socrates gives an example: the eye and some commensurate object approach each other and find each other in the vicinity of one another. Then something happens in the intermediate space—change.

³² 156 C 7–D 3; translation Fowler, modified.

We are at the heart of the theory of *delocalised* change, expanding on the model put forth in the second step at 153 E 4–154 A 9 (see pp. 202–203 above).

Now when the eye and some commensurate object which approaches (ᾠμμα καὶ ἄλλο τι τῶν τούτῳ συμμέτρων πλησιάσαν) beget whiteness and the corresponding perception (γεννήσῃ τὴν λευκότητά τε καὶ αἴσθησιν αὐτῇ σύμφυτον)—which could never have been produced by either of them meeting anything else (ἃ οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἐγένετο ἐκατέρου ἐκείνων πρὸς ἄλλο ἐλθόντος)—then, while sight from the eye and whiteness from that which helps to produce the color are carried in the middle (τότε δὴ μεταξύ φερομένων τῆς μὲν ὀψεως πρὸς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, τῆς δὲ λευκότητος πρὸς τοῦ συναποτίκτοντος τὸ χρῶμα), the eye becomes full of sight and so begins at that moment to see, and becomes, certainly not sight, but a seeing eye (ὁ μὲν ὀφθαλμὸς ἄρα ὀψεως ἔμπλεως ἐγένετο καὶ ὁρᾷ δὴ τότε καὶ ἐγένετο οὐ τι ὄψις ἀλλ’ ὀφθαλμὸς ὁρῶν), and the object which joined in begetting the color is filled with whiteness and becomes in its turn, not whiteness, but white, whether it be a stick or a stone, or whatever it be the hue of which is so colored (τὸ δὲ συγγενήσαν τὸ χρῶμα λευκότητος περιεπλήσθη καὶ ἐγένετο οὐ λευκότης αὖ ἀλλὰ λευκόν, εἴτε ξύλον εἴτε λίθος εἴτε ὅτιοῦν συνέβη χρῆμα χρωσθῆναι τῷ τοιούτῳ χρώματι).³³

We can now distinguish three levels of motion and change:

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Slow motions giving birth | The eye | The commensurate object in the vicinity |
| Item being born and moving in the middle | The sensation of vision coming from the eye | Whiteness coming from what produces colour |
| Change in the slow motion | The eye is ‘filled’ with vision, becomes a ‘seeing eye’ | The corresponding thing is ‘filled’ with whiteness and becomes ‘white’ |

In the intermediate space, two twin motions are being born in fast translation, and from this translation something results for the original motions, the slow ones. One could object that this seems to relocalize change as an intrinsic event happening within something: but in fact there are two types of events: effects (and not states) happening in the perceiver and in the perceived (being ‘filled’ with the action), the very act of perceiving and the perceived properties themselves happening out of them (and never in them), in the middle, carried by them. Then the perceived object is seen as white (“filled with whiteness”, λευκότητος περιεπλήσθη, 156 E 5), and is white for the perceiver (also ‘filled with whiteness’). Change is now a shared process. If we can still

³³ 156 D 3–E 7, translation Fowler, modified.

say that something is seeing and something is seen, and seen, furthermore, as having such and such a property, this is only the result of the fast translations happening between two items. Seeing and being seen are a shared process, two sides to the same common act. The property of the perceived thing is an offshoot of this interaction, just as much as perception is.

(iv). *All Becoming Is Becoming for Some Perceiver* (157 B 7–C 3)

It follows from this theory that nothing is something by itself: everything is becoming—that is, becoming for some perceiver. The ontology according to which nothing has a property by itself may be derived from this new theory of motion and perception. It is now much more precise than before: it is because properties are offshoots of perceptive interactions that nothing can be said to be something by itself. It turns out to be different things depending on the interactions. Even being the active one or the passive one—i.e., being the perceived or the perceiving side of the process. No property pre-exists the encounter. Everything that is to be perceived in the whole universe is private, encapsulated in the brief moment of interaction, and taken away from the eyes of any other witness.

We could also add that the ground is now even clear for adopting the three principles stated above as relevant to an intrinsic theory of motion. Now that all change consists in the interactions of perception, it is also possible for Protagoras to say that nothing changes without undergoing something. Only the very definition of change has been altered: change is permanent generation and translation—there is no more alteration. The three principles are not in conflict anymore: our initiation has brought peace back in our souls. We now have a link between this theory of motion and perception and Protagoras' theory of knowledge, through the ontology according to which nothing is something in itself. Motion is now following the logic of appearances. By the same token, variation of aspects is a type of flux. This type of motion imagined under the spell of Protagoras will be altered in a dramatic manner in 181 B 8–182 C 8, when Socrates reintroduces alteration in a model where before there was only translation and generation.³⁴

³⁴ This is also why, when we speak of Heracliteanism in Plato, we should be careful to distinguish the many types of change (i.e., of real change, change over time). In this part of the *Theaetetus* alone, there are three different models, involving different combinations of translation, alteration, and generation each time: the Panheraclitean model, the secret doctrine we just went through, and the radical mobilism introduced at the end of this part of

3. TESTIMONIES TO PROTAGORAS' THOUGHT?

Plato has produced a substantial theory here, and Protagoras' voice has definitely been, throughout this passage, a collective one that we could not really imagine recognizing as a genuine recording of the actual wording of Protagoras' doctrine. If Protagoras was presented as if speaking with all the voices of Greece, he was also speaking with the voice of Plato's imagination. The very subtle theory of motion and ontology of action that has been produced in these pages seems to be an original creation—a radical subversion of all inheritance in this domain, a construction original enough to start a life of its own,³⁵ rather than the mere expression of a vague common ground nourished by every wise man in Greece since Homer. This is how we interpret the strategy of the whole passage, and this is our answer to the question of how Plato invokes Protagoras here (see problem 1, p. 197 above).

What, then, are the consequences for selecting testimonies for Protagoras from this passage (problem 5)? Although it does not provide us with any material from which fragments are to be extracted, the presentation of the secret doctrine at 156 A nevertheless has a sound claim to the title of a testimony for Protagoras in several ways. In the first place as a shrine in which alone, according to Plato, Protagoras' doctrine of knowledge can be safe from harm—or at least protected from the usual criticism it receives³⁶ (if

the dialogue. For a description of all the different models, see Macé 2006, 109–127. We should not reduce change over time to any one of the models, as many authors do. See, for example, Irwin 1977, 4, wherein 's-change' is described as change over time where something undergoes a process, is reduced to the type of flux imagined in 181 B 8–182 C 8, and the two previous models of change over time are ignored.

³⁵ One could argue, for example, that Epicurus' theory of perception in the *Letter to Herodotus* has some features in common with the theory developed by Plato in support of Protagoras' doctrine of knowledge, especially through the idea that it is the difference in speed that distinguishes both the agent and the patient of an interaction of perception from the images produced by this interaction. Slow items interact, and fast ones travel in between them. On the idea that some aspects of Epicurean physics might be traced back to the general theory developed in this part of the *Theaetetus*, see Macé 2003.

³⁶ In the passage following, Socrates will prove his point about this theory of motion being the implicit doctrine of Protagoras, because it provides the only framework within which Protagoras could answer his usual critics. A few apparently traditional arguments against the idea that knowledge is sensation will be invoked: arguments from the states in which we obviously have false sensations (dream, madness, disease, 157 E 1–158 B 4); the argument of indistinction between dreaming and being awake (158 B 5–D 6). At 158 E 5–160 E 4 an answer is offered on the basis of the principle of the uniqueness of encounters, or the principle of permanent generation of properties, which discards all framework that could make a common reference to the perceptions of the mad or sick man and those of the healthy one, or those of the

not from Plato's own criticism that it will soon meet with). Or, secondly, as a 'Protagorean' theory of change—a theory of change that, according to Plato, needs to be created to sustain a Protagorean epistemology (as it is usually described) or (as we would now describe it) as the effect that believing in a Protagorean theory of knowledge should have on the way we understand change. The secret doctrine is a philosophical effect of Protagoras' *homo mensura* theory on a theory of change, and therefore on physics in general. The threat of things in the world starting to behave that way, people becoming smaller without changing, or of change consisting precisely in this, having as many aspects as one can have interactions and relations, is a good example of how things would ultimately be impervious to science if left to Protagoras. Plato expands upon Protagoras in order to stave off the danger he saw in his doctrine that man is the measure of all things. He makes a giant out of one sentence, drawing out its implications. In this manner, Protagoras rises to the sky, and the theory of knowledge becomes a theory of all things. This is not the worst testimony a thinker might dream of: Plato became a radical Protagorean for a day, and left this homage to the historical Protagoras.

Now, the passage at 154 B 1–D 7, too (with the first puzzle and the two interventions of the character of Protagoras—to which one could add 155 B 5–10 with the second puzzle) has a good claim to become a testimony in our editions of Protagoras. Plato here portrays a Protagoras intervening in a dialogue to make a young bright mathematician wonder about some puzzle that leads us to see that the logic of appearances can be really intriguing, as things do acquire qualities or get to be counted differently without changing, being increased, or reduced. This is a very vivid portrait of Protagoras. It is, of course, framed by the way Plato reads Protagoras: but once we are aware of that, there is no reason to reject it as a testimony. Having made explicit our claims concerning problem 5, we will turn back to problem 3.

We said, to begin with, that the assessment of Plato's testimony should include probing the compatibility of the perception of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* with the perception of the same Protagoras in other dialogues: the consistency of the whole picture is, of course, not a proof of authenticity, but it does enhance the testimony of a philosopher when it is proven that he

dreaming man and those of someone awake. There always are only singular perceptions that meet one thing which will never be the same again. On this basis the doctrine of Protagoras is true, connected with that of Heraclitus, and both support the thesis that knowledge is sensation. Socrates quotes Protagoras also in 160 D 9, but Diels does not accept it as a fragment nor as a testimony—but the same formula is explicitly quoted in 161 C 4–7, which Diels then selects.

is concerned in many different ways with a predecessor as a crucial figure. From this perspective, the portrait of Protagoras drawn in the *Theaetetus* has been compared to the political portrait in the *Protagoras*.³⁷ We would like to contribute to this comparison by elaborating upon the political consequences of the principle of the uniqueness of encounters according to which everything is '*idion*' and there is no *koinon* possible. The use of concepts that also have a political significance is not without meaning here. Protagoras theory of knowledge and the physics it requires destroys the very idea of a community of men that Protagoras, in the *Protagoras*, describes as made possible through the gift of justice by Zeus to all men³⁸ and also threatens the community referred to in the apology of Protagoras, made later in the *Theaetetus*.³⁹ No common perception of anything is ever possible, whether in a polis or simply in the physical realm of nature. Protagoras' physics in the *Theaetetus* is haunting Protagoras' politics in the *Protagoras*, suggesting that behind the democratic ideals and the claim that anyone can say what he thinks about justice and that each voice is as good as the other, one can hear the *homo mensura*-doctrine which is the starting-point of our passage. Behind the *idiôtês*, the individual citizen of the Assembly, hides the *idion* of our secret doctrine and the privatisation of all perception. In a manner not uncommon to the way he treats some of his predecessors on this subject,⁴⁰ Plato radicalizes Protagoras' view of knowledge to use it as an argument against democracy, as a system naturally unable to sustain a *politeia*, an ordered community, which requires a common view shared by all citizens. This is a typically anti-democratic polemic, taking away from democracy what it pretends to have as a privilege, uniting men in a common vision, whereas oligarchy or tyranny sends them home on their own to mind their own business.⁴¹ In this light, the passages highlighted here from the *Theaetetus* become more of a political charge against democracy than any passage taken from the *Protagoras*. Because it accepts the way things appear to each individual, democracy is epistemologically condemned to a privatised world.

³⁷ See for instance Havelock 1957; Papadopoulos 1984.

³⁸ Plato *Prot.* 322 D 1–2.

³⁹ *Tht.* 165 E 8–168 C 5.

⁴⁰ This is precisely the point of Havelock's argument (1957).

⁴¹ For the idea that men united in a fight for democracy are a collective force, and that the return of tyranny or oligarchy sends them to their private homes to mind their very own business, compare Herodotus 1.62–63 and 169.

4. PHILOSOPHICAL EFFECT ON PLATO?

Plato has also given us a different kind of testimony as he lets us get a grasp of the extent of Protagoras' philosophical significance for his own thought (problem 2, pp. 197–198 above). We may not gain direct access to the original Protagoras, but we do have the possibility of measuring the shape of his impact on a prominent philosopher of the next century. The character of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* leads us to a puzzle by which he reveals to us that perception has a different logic than the one we spontaneously would ascribe to change. In this perspective, the theory of change developed in the following pages is like an amplification of the original puzzling strength of perception: it enables us to see on a large scale what the world would look like if it followed the logic of our senses. The character of Protagoras is the bearer of this logic, in its most troubling guise.

If Protagoras is right, then the world really is the way we perceive it to be, and the idea that everything changes is going to look very different: change will follow the rule of our perception, that is real change will behave exactly as variation of appearances does. The wine is bitter to one, at the same time it is sweet to another, and this is the occurrence of a *real change*. Plato apparently attached great significance to that kind of 'change' when he built his theory of Ideas—although he did not believe it to be 'change', but only that things could be seen as both equal and unequal, beautiful and not beautiful at the same time. Plato nevertheless seems to have found it important that his Forms were not only safe from actual becoming (change in time) but also from variation of appearances (being something in one respect, and another thing in another): see for instance *Symposium* 210 E 6–211 B 5. But then, was Plato really worried that variation of appearances could be confused with becoming? That flux could become Protagorean? Here I want to submit a hypothesis for further research: for instance, in the passage of the *Phaedo* we mentioned earlier, Simmias may appear big as compared to Socrates and small as compared to Phaedo, without having changed at all.⁴² But at this point in the *Phaedo*, where all horizontal causes of change have been discarded, and the naive causality of Forms remains as the only cause of the presence of a property in something, if Simmias has tallness in him each time he is compared to somebody smaller and smallness in him each time he is compared to somebody taller, then the only causality by which we now can understand how things acquire qualities actually follows the logic of

⁴² *Phd.* 102 B 3–103 A 3; see p. 204 above.

the variation of appearance. Greatness comes into and goes out of Simmias depending on the context of comparison. So the doctrine of participation is actually at risk of becoming Protagorean; this risk will be looming as long as Plato is not indexing changes of participation to some horizontal causation, some network of auxiliary factors, or *sunaitai*. I believe this is the reason why Plato reintroduces a new type of cause at 105 B 6–C 6. Actually a reader of the *Phaedo* who would—like Aristotle, as is clear from *Metaphysics* 991 b 3–4—only read in it the causality of Forms, and nothing else to explain change and becoming, would have good reason to believe that Plato actually was the type of Protagorean character we have met in our passage of the *Theaetetus*—one whose theory of participation erases the difference between actual change and aspect change, both of them only consisting, for all things which do participate in the intelligible—sensibles as well as souls and cities—, in a mere exchange of participations, from one Form to another. If we read the *Phaedo* at least until 105 B–C, however, there is no reason to be such a reader. Still we might be able to acknowledge that the Protagorean vertigo that appears in the *Theaetetus* constitutes a real threat to the doctrine of Forms and participation: a threat that can only be staved off if one does connect this theory with a solid network of horizontal physical interactions, themselves indexed on the inner nature of agents and patients.⁴³ The thought experiment of this part of the *Theaetetus* thus shows its crucial philosophical importance, revealing what is absolutely needed for a Platonist not to remain Protagorean once this experiment is finished: namely a totally different theory of activity and passivity than the one displayed here.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

PERCEPTUAL RELATIVISM AND CHANGE IN THE SECRET DOCTRINE IN PLATO'S *THEAETETUS* 152–160

Job van Eck

In Plato's *Theaetetus* 152 C 8–E 9 Socrates introduces a strong type of Heracliteanism as the secret truth of Protagoras' man-measure doctrine, which he had just equated with Theaetetus' account of knowledge as sense-perception (151 E 8–152 A 4). In 153 D 8–154 A 8 he tells us that a perceptual property is the result of an interaction between a perceiver and an object. Thus, a given colour, say white, is something peculiar to each perceiver and varies with each time of perception. Now, if something were white or large, it could not become different without changing itself. But this will force us to say ridiculous things—so Protagoras would say (154 B 1–9). This is made clear by an example. When you take six dice and put four dice beside them, they are more than the four, while when you put twelve dice beside them, they are less. What is one to say about that? Surely, something cannot become 'more' without undergoing increase? (154 C 1–9). From 156 A 3 onwards Socrates further elaborates the Heraclitean theory. Everything is movement. But there are two types of movement: one having the power to act, and another the power to be acted upon. When two movements of different types meet, for instance, a stone (active) and a perceiver or an eye (passive), they simultaneously generate a twofold offspring, a sensed quality (for instance, a colour) and a perception (for instance, seeing a colour). The movement of the generators is slow, that of the offspring quick.

Commentators roughly agree on a number of points about the interpretation of this so-called Secret Doctrine (cp. ἐν ἀπορρήτῳ 152 C 10), which together are what may be called the standard interpretation. The kernel of the standard interpretation, i.e. that Protagoras' doctrine involves perceptual relativism, has been criticized by Gail Fine,¹ but wrongly so. Nevertheless, the problem that gives rise to her reading is a serious one and cannot be solved

¹ Fine 2003.

by the standard interpretation. I will further criticize this interpretation and argue that it results in a distorted reading of the text and a theory of flux that is too awkward to be taken seriously. To conclude, I will offer another interpretation.

1. INTRODUCTION: PERCEPTUAL RELATIVISM

Most commentators hold that Protagoras' doctrine amounts to perceptual relativism.² Perceptual properties are relational, that is to say, objects do not really and intrinsically have them; in the case of a change of colour, the coloured object undergoes a mere Cambridge change,³ that is to say, it does not itself genuinely change (just as the six dice in the example do not genuinely change from being more to being less).

This interpretation is criticized by Fine on the ground that it makes Heracliteanism irrelevant to Protagoras' position, or even incompatible with it.

1.1. *Fine's Criticism*

The argument against perceptual relativism is concentrated on 154 B 1–3, where Socrates says:

[1]

οὐκοῦν εἰ μὲν ᾧ παραμετρούμεθα ἢ οὐ ἐφαπτόμεθα μέγα ἢ λευκὸν ἢ θερμὸν ἦν, οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἄλλω προσπεσὼν ἄλλο ἂν ἐγέγονει, αὐτό γε μὴδὲν μεταβάλλον.

Well now, if what we measure ourselves against or what we touch were large or white or hot, it would never have become different by having collided with another person, at any rate, not if it did not undergo any change itself.

Plato *Theaetetus* 154 B 1–3

Interpreted in terms of perceptual relativism, this passage says that an object can appear white and then not white whilst remaining unchanged itself. But this is in contradiction with 156 A 3–5, where Socrates says:

[2]

ἀρχὴ δέ, ἐξ ἧς καὶ ἃ νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν πάντα ἥρτηται, ἥδε αὐτῶν, ὡς τὸ πᾶν κίνησις ἦν καὶ ἄλλο παρὰ τοῦτο οὐδέν.

² For instance, Cornford 1935; Burnyeat 1990; Lee 2000; McDowell 1973; Sedley 2004.

³ For a 'Cambridge change' see note 6 below; cp. Macé in this volume, n. 1, pp. 195–196 above.

Their starting-point, on which in fact everything we just were saying depends, is this: the universe is change and nothing else besides that.

Plato *Theaetetus* 156 A 3–5

An interpretation which assumes that the object in 154 B 1–3 ([1]) does not change, cannot be right, Fine argues, for on this account Protagoras is initially defended by an appeal to an ontology that looks incompatible with Heracliteanism. Fine offers another reading of 154 B 1–6 and C 2–5, involving the puzzle of the dice. Before we turn to this interpretation, we will give the text of 154 C 2–D 2 ([3]). Socrates presents the puzzle as an example of the ridiculous things we are forced to say, according to Protagoras, given what was said in 154 B 1–3 ([1]):

[3]

ΣΩ. ἀστραγάλους γάρ που ἕξ, ἂν μὲν τέτταρας αὐτοῖς προσενέγκῃς, πλείους φαμέν εἶναι τῶν τεττάρων καὶ ἡμιολίους, ἐὰν δὲ δώδεκα, ἐλάττους καὶ ἡμίσεις, καὶ οὐδὲ ἀνεκτὸν ἄλλως λέγειν· ἢ σὺ ἀνέξῃ;

ΘΕΑΙ. οὐκ ἔγωγε.

ΣΩ. τί οὖν; ἂν σε Πρωταγόρας ἔρηται ἢ τις ἄλλος· “ὦ Θεαίτητε, ἔσθ’ ὅπως τι μείζον ἢ πλέον γίγνεται ἄλλως ἢ αὐξηθέν;” τί ἀποκρινῇ;

ΘΕΑΙ. ἐὰν μὲν, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ δοκοῦν πρὸς τὴν νῦν ἐρώτησιν ἀποκρίνωμαι, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν· ἐὰν δὲ πρὸς τὴν προτέραν, φυλάττων μὴ ἐναντία εἶπω, ὅτι ἔστιν.

so. Take six dice. If you put four beside them, we say they are more than the four, in fact one and a half as many; and if (you put) twelve (beside them), fewer, in fact half as many. And the case does not allow at all of describing (it) in a different way; or will you allow it?

THEAE. No, I will not.

so. Well, now, suppose that Protagoras, or anyone else, asks you this: “Theaetetus, is there any way in which something can become larger or more numerous, other than by being increased?” What will you answer?

THEAE. If I answer by saying what I think with a view to the present question, Socrates, I’ll say there is not. But if I answer with a view to the one before, I’ll be on my guard against contradicting myself and say that there is.

Plato *Theaetetus* 154 C 2–D 2 (The dice)

In 155 B 5–C 4 we find another example: within a year Socrates will have become smaller than Theaetetus, not because he loses length, but because Theaetetus has grown.

1.2. *Fine's Reading of 154 B 1–6 and C 2–5*

On the basis of the idea that for Protagoras things are (for one) just as they appear to be, Fine tells us that

“... in the case described in 154 B, Protagoras argues as follows:⁴

- (1) There are, or at least seem to be, conflicting appearances; for example, the stone appears white at t_1 , then not white at t_2 .
- (2) Things are however they appear to be.
- (3) Therefore, the stone was white, then not white.
- (4) Therefore it changed, from being white to being not white.

In the case of the dice, similarly, Protagoras argues as follows:

- (1') There are, or at least seem to be, conflicting appearances; for example, the dice appear more (than the four) at t_1 , then fewer (than the twelve) at t_2 .
- (2') Things are however they appear to be.
- (3') Therefore, the dice were more, then fewer.
- (4') Therefore, they changed, from being more to being fewer.

Notice, in support of this interpretation, that Plato carefully describes the dice example in terms of conflicting appearances at different times (...). He [Plato] asks what we should say when someone first sees six dice placed next to four, and then sees them placed next to twelve so that they appear different on the two occasions of comparison. If his point were that the puzzles could be solved simply by noting that various properties are relational, he would not emphasize that we are concerned with conflicting appearances that occur at different times.”

1.3. *Comment*

154 C 2–5, the Dice

The example of the dice is variously misrepresented here and seriously so. In the first place, it is alleged that the situation involves someone who first sees the six dice compared with four and then with twelve other dice. The text, however, does not say or even suggest that there is a succession of events. It has ἄν in 154 C 2 (and ἐάν in 154 C 4) with a subjunctive in a *general condition*, and so we have “whenever (i.e., on whatever occasion) you put four dice ..., whenever twelve ...”. This does not suggest any time-relation between the two situations, and it is certainly not excluded that the two comparisons could take place at the same time. Furthermore, the question that causes the

⁴ Fine 2003, 179–180. In a footnote the author adds that 154 B itself does not say whether the object has changed, though it leaves this possibility open. She means that Protagoras goes on to say that this possibility is actual (179, n. 41).

puzzlement, “Theaetetus, is there any way in which something can become larger or more numerous, other than by being increased?” (154 C 7–9), does not refer to both situations, but only to the first one mentioned: did the dice become more or not? Nor is there any indication that the qualifications ‘being more than the four’ (cp. 154 C 3) and ‘being fewer than the 12’ (cp. 154 C 4) are regarded as *conflicting* appearances, seemingly or not. What is more, how could Plato, who portrayed Theaetetus as a brilliant student of mathematics,⁵ have him think here they are conflicting, i.e., contradictory? In fact, the dice example is not described in terms of *appearances* at all. We have left the context of 153 D 8–154 B 9 of a perceptual property originating from “the collision of the eyes with the appropriate motion” (153 E 6–7) as something peculiar to each one, that does not appear the same to two observers or even to one observer at two occasions. The case of the dice is represented in a different way. That the six dice are seen or described as being ‘more than the four’ (154 C 3) and ‘less than the twelve’ (154 C 4) respectively, is not represented as constitutive of the six dice being more than the four (and less than the twelve) in the way the eye’s seeing the white stone is constitutive of the stone’s being white. The being more than the four is not presented as something peculiar to Theaetetus or another observer. That it is Theaetetus who is imagined to put the four dice beside the six and who says, with Socrates, that they are more, does not matter: “the case does not allow at all of describing (it) in a different way ...” (154 C 4–5). So Protagoras is not arguing, as Fine holds he does, from an appearance (cp. 1’) via (2’) “Things are however they appear to be” to the statement that the dice are more (cp. 3’). He simply *states* that whenever Theaetetus puts four dice beside a given group of six dice, the six are more than the four, and whenever he puts twelve dice beside the six, the six are less. And the question is: have the six dice become more in the first situation envisaged, although they did not undergo increase? Thus, far from being concerned with situations described as occurring at different times, or as conflicting, or even as appearances, 154 C 2–5 presents a situation in which four dice are put beside a given group of six dice, and a situation in which twelve dice are put beside the group of six dice with a view to raising the above question about the first situation. The difficulty is that the six dice have become more than the four without increasing in number, i.e., without changing in the relevant way.

⁵ Plato *Theaetetus* 144 A 1–B 6, 147 D 4–148 B 5.

154 B 1–6

According to Fine's reading, the stone, in first appearing white, then not white, changes from being white to being not white. She notes that 154 B 1–3 ([1]) leaves open the possibility that the object in becoming different does change (179 n. 41). But this will not do: the Greek does not allow this interpretation. The sentence is a conditional with $\epsilon\iota$ + the imperfect $\hat{\eta}\nu$ in the protasis, and the pluperfect $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\gamma\acute{o}\nu\epsilon\iota$ + $\acute{\alpha}\nu$ in the apodosis. Such a construction represents an *unreal* condition: the situation envisaged is a non-real case. In reality, then, the object is not white and it has become different simply by colliding with a different observer, even while it did not undergo any change itself. The message is clear: because the object becomes different simply by colliding with something different without changing itself, it is not white.

But now we are left with the problem that Fine's interpretation was meant to solve: how are we to reconcile this with 156 A 3–5 ([2]), i.e., that the universe is change and nothing else besides that, and 160 D 6–9, i.e., that all things change, like streams? This question has not received an acceptable answer by the defenders of the interpretation of perceptual relativism.

2. THE STANDARD INTERPRETATION

The standard interpretation is characterized by the following points:

- (1) The puzzles of the dice and Socrates becoming smaller without losing length arise because of a wrong view of relations. The solution offered by the Secret Doctrine is that some properties do not belong intrinsically to things but do so in relation to something else.
- (2) The change an object undergoes is a mere Cambridge change, a change between non-intrinsic properties, properties which do not inhere in the object, but are moving between object and perceiver.⁶
- (3) The 'quick' movement of the perceptual properties and the perceptions (the offspring of 156 A 3–157 C 3) is locomotion, a travelling between object and perceiver; the 'slow' movement of object and perceiver (the parents of 156 A 3–157 C 3) is change of quality.

⁶ The phrase 'Cambridge change' was introduced by Geach 1969, 71–72. Something undergoes a Cambridge change when a statement becomes true of it which was not true of it before (as formulated by McDowell 1973, 136). In the example of 155 B 5–C 7, both Socrates and Theaetetus have undergone a Cambridge change, but the change Theaetetus has undergone is a real, intrinsic change, a change in himself, whereas Socrates' becoming smaller than Theaetetus is a mere, strict, Cambridge change, not a change he undergoes himself.

- (4) The object is merely a bundle of properties as perceived by a subject, and the subject merely a bundle of perceptions; neither objects nor perceivers have endurance through time as they do not survive the encounter in which they come into being, everything being constantly replaced by a new object or perceiver.

In the present section I shall deal with points 1, 2 and 3, in section 3 with point 4.⁷

2.1. *The Puzzles, a Wrong View of Relations?*

In Cornford 1935 and Lee 2000 we find a clearly articulated version of the standard reading of the function of the puzzles and their solution. Cornford writes “It is clear that the difficulty here exists only for one who thinks of ‘large’ as a quality residing in the thing which is larger than something else, with ‘small’ as the answering quality residing in the smaller thing. If that is so, then, when the large thing is compared with something larger instead of something smaller, he will suppose that it has lost its quality ‘large’ and gained instead the quality ‘small’. By suffering this internal change it will have ‘become small’. He will then be puzzled when we point out that the thing has not altered in size.” (Cornford 1935, 43–44). Lee claims that Cornford here correctly identifies both the confusion and the Secret Doctrine solution to the puzzles. According to her, the Secret Doctrine tells us not to locate largeness and smallness in objects. Those who persist in doing so “will assume that change with respect to these properties constitutes internal change. They will then be unable to understand how something can ‘become different’—e.g. larger or smaller—without changing in itself.” (Lee 2000, 70–71).

I will argue that the confusion caused by the puzzles and their solution are not correctly identified here. The present view on relations is perfectly

⁷ Authors subscribing to point 1 are Bostock 1988, 45–46, Burnyeat 1990, 13, Cornford 1935, 43–44, Lee 2000, 70–72 and Sedley 2004, 44. McDowell hesitates. He thinks it is possible that Plato failed to see through the seeming contradictions the puzzles offer (1973, 133–137). Among those commentators who endorse point 2 and think that properties are travelling between object and perceiver, and that the slow movement of object and perceiver (cf. [9]) is qualitative change (point 3), are Cornford 1935, 49–50, Lee 2000, 62–66, 74–76, McDowell 1973, 138, 143 and Sedley 2004, 92. (Crombie 1963, 21–23 and Bostock 1988, 63 endorse point 2 and the first part of 3.) Bostock 1988, 65–66, 70–80, Burnyeat 1990, 18 and Sedley 2004, 46–47 support point 4; they base their interpretation upon *Theaetetus* 157 B–C and 158 E–160 C (see van Eck 2009, 220–229). McDowell 1973, 144–145, 148–150 does not have a firm standpoint.

adequate and does not give rise to the supposed puzzlement. We find this view on relations, the target of Cornford's criticism,⁸ in a passage of the *Phaedo*:

[4]

..., ἀρ' οὐχ, ὅταν Σιμμίαν Σωκράτους φῆς μείζω εἶναι, Φαίδωνος δὲ ἐλάττω, λέγεις τότ' εἶναι ἐν τῷ Σιμμίᾳ ἀμφοτέρω, καὶ μέγεθος καὶ σμικρότητα; ... οὐ ... που πεφυκέναι Σιμμίαν ὑπερέχειν τούτῳ, τῷ Σιμμίᾳ εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τῷ μεγέθει ὃ τυγχάνει ἔχων· οὐδ' αὖ Σωκράτους ὑπερέχειν ὅτι Σωκράτης ὁ Σωκράτης ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ὅτι σμικρότητα ἔχει ὁ Σωκράτης πρὸς τὸ ἐκείνου μέγεθος;—ἀληθῆ.—οὐδέ γε αὖ ὑπὸ Φαίδωνος ὑπερέχεσθαι τῷ ὅτι Φαίδων ὁ Φαίδων ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ὅτι μέγεθος ἔχει ὁ Φαίδων πρὸς τὴν Σιμμίου σμικρότητα;—ἔστι ταῦτα.

... whenever you say that Simmias is larger than Socrates, but smaller than Phaedo, you mean then, don't you, that both things are in Simmias, largeness and smallness? ... it is not the nature of the case that Simmias overtops by that, by being Simmias, but by the largeness he happens to have. Nor again does he overtop Socrates because Socrates is Socrates, but because of smallness that Socrates has in relation to (πρὸς) his largeness?—True.—Nor again is he overtopped by Phaedo because Phaedo is Phaedo, but because Phaedo has largeness in relation to (πρὸς) Simmias' smallness?—That is so.

Plato *Phaedo* 102 B 4–6, C 1–10

We see that Simmias is larger than Socrates and smaller than Phaedo, because both largeness and smallness are residing in Simmias. That is possible because Simmias' largeness and smallness are related to (cp. πρὸς) different items, i.e. the smallness in Socrates and the largeness in Phaedo respectively. So, although Simmias' largeness is thought to be residing in Simmias, there is no reason to suppose that when he is compared with the larger Phaedo after having been compared to Socrates, he would lose the largeness he has in relation to Socrates. In the view presented in the *Phaedo*, a relation is a pair of answering participations in Forms. It is not represented in the way we are used to, by one dyadic predicate with two subjects (as in *La, b*: 'a is larger than b') but by two monadic predicates, each having one subject, which are coupled to each other. (This suggests the notation *LaSb*: 'a has largeness in relation to b's having smallness').⁹

Actually, with the help of this conception of relations, we can easily distinguish between an intrinsic change and a mere Cambridge change. Let the period of the change of Socrates becoming smaller than Theaetetus

⁸ Cornford 1935, 44–45.

⁹ Castaneda 1972. See also van Eck 1994.

lie between time t_1 and time t_2 . Socrates has undergone an intrinsic change if he has become smaller than himself, that is, if at t_2 he is smaller than he was at t_1 . On the above view, this can be represented as: Socrates has at t_1 largeness in relation to the smallness he has at t_2 (semi-formally: $L_{t_1}S_{t_2}S$). So, if Socrates has at t_1 largeness in relation to the smallness he has at t_2 , it is an intrinsic change of Socrates; if not, he has undergone merely a strict Cambridge change. (Trying to formulate this in the language of 20th century predicate logic, one will not succeed without artificial tricks.)

So we see that the question whether one thinks that there is a largeness in Socrates which he loses when the smaller person he is compared with becomes larger than Socrates, is irrelevant for the question whether Socrates suffers a real change or a strict Cambridge change. And, indeed, there is no indication in the examples of the dice and Socrates that the idea of a relative property like largeness residing in a thing would lead to the puzzle; in fact, there is no trace of such an idea. And Theaetetus, who is a brilliant student of mathematics, would not have been led astray by it. In fact his puzzle is: how can I describe a mere Cambridge change without talking nonsense or contradicting myself? The sentence ' x becomes more/smaller than y ' suggests that x is the subject of the change involved but in the cases of the dice and Socrates x is not undergoing the change itself. And this is precisely the situation of an object becoming different without changing itself, as in 154 B 1–3 ([1]).

2.2. *The Quality Moving between Object and Perceiver*

There are two passages which may be adduced in support of the claim that a property like whiteness is between the object and the perceiver, one of them also suggesting that it is moving there as well.

[5]

... ὅτι οὖν ... χρώμα ἐκ τῆς προσβολῆς τῶν ὁμμάτων πρὸς τὴν προσήκουσαν φορὰν φανέεται γεγεννημένον, καὶ ὃ δὴ ἕκαστον εἶναί φαμεν χρώμα οὔτε τὸ προσβάλλον οὔτε τὸ προσβαλλόμενον ἔσται, ἀλλὰ μεταξύ τι ἐκάστω ἴδιον γεγονός.

Any ... colour will turn out to have come into being from the collision of the eyes with the appropriate motion, and what we say a given colour is will be neither the thing which collides, nor the thing it collides with, but something which has come into being between them; something peculiar to each one.

Plato *Theaetetus* 153 E 5–154 A 3

Does this μεταξύ indicate a place between the eye and the object observed? What is claimed here is that the colour is not identical with the thing

which collides, nor with the thing collided with, in other words, that it is different from both. And it is said that it is something μεταξύ. Now, μεταξύ is not only used to indicate a location. ‘Something μεταξύ’ may signify a third thing besides two given items, classified as something intermediate between the two.¹⁰ This would give good sense here too. However that may be, the phrase ἀλλὰ μεταξύ τι here, in 154 A 2, is not used to mark an opposition to a location, for instance, ‘in the eye’ or ‘in the thing which collides’, but to an identification: the colour is not the eye, nor the object observed.

[6]

ἐπειδὴν οὖν ὄμμα καὶ ἄλλο τι τῶν τούτῳ συμμέτρων πλησιάσαν γεννήσῃ τὴν λευκότητά τε καὶ αἴσθησιν αὐτῇ σύμφυτον, ... τότε δὴ μεταξύ φερομένων τῆς μὲν ὄψεως πρὸς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, τῆς δὲ λευκότητος πρὸς τοῦ συναποτίκτοντος τὸ χρῶμα, ὁ μὲν ὀφθαλμὸς ἄρα ὄψεως ἔμπλεως ἐγένετο καὶ ὁρᾷ δὴ τότε ..., τὸ δὲ συγγενήσαν τὸ χρῶμα λευκότητος περιεπλήσθη καὶ ἐγένετο οὐ λευκότης αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ λευκόν, εἴτε ξύλον εἴτε λίθος εἴτε ὅτιον συνέβη ...

When an eye, then, and something else, one of the things commensurable with it, approach one another and generate the whiteness they do, and a perception cognate with it (...), then at that moment, when the seeing, from the eyes, and the whiteness, from the thing which joins in giving birth to the colour, are moving in between, the eye has come to be full of seeing; it sees at that moment (...). And the thing which joined in generating the colour has been filled all round with whiteness; it has come to be, again, not whiteness, but white—a white piece of wood, or stone, or whatever it is (...).

Plato *Theaetetus* 156 D 3–E 7 (translation McDowell)

As we see, not only the whiteness, but also the other offspring, the seeing is ‘moving between’ the eye and the object. Should we conclude that the seeing is not in the eye, but somewhere in between the eye and the object? It is said that “the eye has come to be full of seeing”. Can this be the case without the seeing being in the eye? As to the observed object, “it has been filled all around with whiteness” (λευκότητος περιεπλήσθη 156 E 5). I think the use of περι- indicates that the whiteness is at (the observed part of) the surface of the object; the inside is not seen. But then, during the process which generates the seeing and the whiteness, it (the whiteness) must be there.

¹⁰ Cp. *Gorgias* 468 A 5 and *Symposium* 202 A 2–3; see also *Timaeus* 50 D 2–4: It is in fact appropriate to compare the receiving thing to a mother, the source to a father, and the nature between them (τὴν δὲ μεταξύ τούτων φύσιν) to their offspring.

A second point is this. The seeing of this colour is only one example of the perception of a quality, and it is used to make clear how perception and quality in general originate in one and the same process as two sides of the same coin. In 156 E 7 Socrates comes to a conclusion, generalizing the foregoing explanation,¹¹

[7]

καὶ τὰλλα δὴ οὕτω, σκληρὸν καὶ θερμὸν καὶ πάντα, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ὑποληπτέον, αὐτὸ μὲν καθ' αὐτὸ μηδὲν εἶναι, ὃ δὴ καὶ τότε ἐλέγομεν, ἐν δὲ τῇ πρὸς ἄλληλα ὁμιλίᾳ πάντα γίγνεσθαι καὶ παντοῖα ἀπὸ τῆς κινήσεως.

We must think of the other cases too in the same way: hard and warm and all things, nothing is it just by itself—we were actually saying that some time ago—but in their intercourse with each other come to be all things and qualified in all ways, as a result of their change.

Plato *Theaetetus* 156 E 7–157 A 2

So, in the case of touching something, the object becomes warm or hard in its 'intercourse' with the touching body (and the touching person perceives warmth and hardness). But now there is no room for the quality perceived in the touching to move in between observer and object. Nevertheless, in the case of touching, too, the perceptual quality and the perceiving are said to φέρεσθαι μεταξύ object and observer, although there is no room between them. This appears from 182 A 7–8 where Socrates recapitulates what was said earlier:

[8]

τῆς θερμότητος ἢ λεοκότητος ἢ ὅτουοῦν γένεσιν οὐχ οὕτω πως ἐλέγομεν φάναι αὐτοὺς, φέρεσθαι ἕκαστον τούτων ἅμα αἰσθήσει μεταξὺ τοῦ ποιοῦντός τε καὶ πάσχοντος.

In the case of hotness, whiteness, or anything of that kind, we said (didn't we?) that they speak of their coming into being on these lines: each of them moves, simultaneously with a perception, between the thing which acts and the thing which is acted on (...). Plato *Theaetetus* 182 A 4–7 (translation McDowell)

Does this perhaps mean that a perceptual quality can shuttle between observer and object when they touch, as a bus does between two adjacent regions, where there is no room in between? Passing the border, or the

¹¹ An earlier generalization is found, soon after our first passage (153 E 5–154 A 3 = [5]), in 154 B 1–3 ([1]): "If what we measure ourselves against or what we touch were large or white or hot, it would never have become different by having collided with a different person (...)". Here we have the relation of touching and the qualification 'hot' and a perceived object is said to collide with a perceiving subject.

common plane of contact, means being alternately both in the observer and in the object. Taking *μεταξὺ φέρεσθαι* as moving to and fro, as traffic, across the touching surfaces, would mean not only that at (fractions of) moments the quality will be in the observer, but also, by the same token, that the perception will sometimes be in the object. This is unacceptable. We must give up the idea that *μεταξὺ* indicates a location for the perceived property and the perception to move in.

2.3. *Quick and Slow Movement*

In 156 A 4–C 5 it is said that all things just introduced move, both the generating elements—object and perceiver—and their offspring, the twins of perception and what is perceived. The text continues:

[9]

(...), τάχος δὲ καὶ βραδύτης ἔνι τῇ κινήσει αὐτῶν. ὅσον μὲν οὖν βραδύ, ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ πρὸς τὰ πλησιάζοντα τὴν κίνησιν ἴσχει καὶ οὕτω δὴ γεννᾷ, τὰ δὲ γεννώμενα οὕτω δὴ θάττω ἐστίν. φέρεται γὰρ καὶ ἐν φορᾷ αὐτῶν ἡ κίνησις πέφυκεν.

(...), but there's quickness and slowness in their changing. Now anything that is slow keeps its changing in the same place (ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ C 10), and in relation to the things which approach it, and that's how it generates. And that's how the things that are generated are quicker; because they move, and their changing naturally consists in motion.

Plato *Theaetetus* 156 C 8–D 3 (translation McDowell)¹²

According to the standard interpretation quick movement, the movement of the twofold offspring, perception and its corresponding sense quality, is locomotion, and the so-called slow movement of the object of perception and the perceiver is alteration.¹³

There are several reasons why this reading is untenable. I shall mention just two. (1) We are told why the things which are generated are quicker: 'φέρεται γὰρ ...' (156 D 2–3). It is odd to compare an item in a qualitative change with something in a change of place in this way and say that the second is quicker for the very reason that it is in locomotion. Then (2), Socrates would make an important distinction between two types of *κίνησις* (one of object and perceiver, the other of sense property and perception) in terms that are not applicable to the whole of the domain for which it is intended. As we saw,

¹² Actually McDowell has "But the things which are generated are quicker" instead of "And that's how the things that are generated are quicker". In a note he remarks that he omits the second οὕτω δὴ (McDowell 1973, 110).

¹³ See note 7 above.

in the case of the hardness of the stone and its perception, the feeling of hardness cannot change place because there is no room between the stone and the hand; there is no distance to traverse with any speed. And so 'quick' is not applicable to them or their κίνησις on this interpretation. I propose another reading.

3. ANOTHER INTERPRETATION

As Socrates expresses it at 160 D 7–8, all things move like streams (οἶον ῥεύματα κινεῖσθαι τὰ πάντα). Everything is a process. There are slow and quick processes. Let us look at [9] again. First some remarks. (1) "Anything that is slow keeps its changing in the same ..." cannot imply that it remains in the same place. There is an encounter involved here of the slow thing with things which approach it, together with which it generates, but these are slow as well: one of them must change place. (2) The remainder of the sentence has baffled commentators: "that's how it generates. And that's how the things that are generated are quicker". Clearly a relation is suggested between (a) the way the slow thing generates, and (b) how it is that the things that are generated are quicker. The question is: why are things that are generated quicker in that way? This is so strange that the new OCT edition even assumes a lacuna after τὰ δὲ γεννώμενα.¹⁴ However, the answer to the question is given immediately: because they φέρεται. Now, the primary meaning of φέρω is 'to bear'. Taking it in this sense we get: "for they are borne and the nature of their movement lies in being borne". So the κίνησις of the colour and the hardness of the stone and their perception is being borne, i.e., being borne during the process of their generation. Now, usually offspring that is generated survives the act of generation: when the process is over, the offspring has come into being. But that is the big difference with the present offspring: when the generating process has ended, only the parents have survived and there is no offspring any longer. The κίνησις of the things generated, their being borne is a process that takes a comparatively short time, shorter than the process of κίνησις of the parents takes. (Note that the κίνησις of the parents is not the process of generating.) Their κίνησις is quicker.¹⁵ That is, they 'move' more

¹⁴ A proposal of Hicken, who in the lacuna proposes to read, e.g., (ἐτέραν τὴν κίνησιν κινούμενα). Cornarius indicated a lacuna before θάπτω. See the new OCT edition 300 *ad* 156 D 1–2.

¹⁵ In *Laches* 192 B 1–3 we find a definition of quickness (τάχος A 1, ταχύτητα A 10): "the power of accomplishing a great deal in a short time, whether in speech or in running or all the other cases".

quickly, they are quicker than the parents. That is why “the things that are generated are quicker in that way”. In a similar way, we see how in the next sentence, too, whiteness and seeing are said “to be borne between” (φέρεισθαι μεταξύ) object and eye, ‘between’ not in the sense of location, but of ‘in the interaction between them’.

Now we must return to the first part of [9], 156 C 9–10 “Anything that is slow keeps its movement in the same ... and in relation to the things which approach it”. Could ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ mean something else than ‘in the same place’? I think so. In 182 D 8–E 2 Socrates asks the question: Shall we say that the perception of seeing and hearing “ever remains constantly in the very seeing or hearing itself” (μένειν ποτὲ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ὁρᾶν ἢ ἀκοῦειν)? If it is correct Greek idiom to say that the perception of seeing remains in the seeing, one could meaningfully say that a movement remains in the moving, and so that whatever is slow keeps its movement in the same, i.e., in the same moving. I propose to read 156 C 9–10 in this sense. The slow thing keeps its movement in the same, i.e., remains the same movement, even in relation to the things which approach it. Such a confrontation does not affect the κίνησις it is. As compared with the volatility and momentary becoming of their offspring, the slow things have a certain stability.

In 154 B 1–155 C 7 we were confronted with the question how it is that an object *x* can become different without undergoing any change itself (αὐτό γε μηδὲν μεταβάλλον 154 B 3); we added Fine’s question: how could *x* nevertheless be changing all the time. The passage 156 A 4–157 C 3 gives the answer. Instead of saying that *x* is *F* we must say that *x* is becoming *F* for someone (cp. 156 E 9–157 B 1). As becoming different is not a change from being *F* to being *F**, but from becoming *F* for someone (in one encounter) to becoming *F** for someone in another encounter, *x* can become different without changing itself (μεταβάλλον); nevertheless *x* κινεῖται: it is a process.

Now, according to point 4 of the standard interpretation (see section 2), *x* does not survive such an encounter: it is replaced by a new object. So that is the way *x* does not change: it does not survive. Without even having had a chance of change! The concept of change (and rest for that matter) is not applicable to it: that would presuppose the very endurance that was denied to *x*. This interpretation involves a philosophical overkill the Secret Doctrine does not need; in fact, it is incompatible with the formulation of the very foundation of it, i.e., that there are two kinds of change, “the one having the power of acting, and the other the power of being acted on” (156 A 5–7). How can one introduce an item *x* with the description ‘having the power to do *A*’, if it is only by doing *A* that *x* comes into being in the first place, and if *x* can

do so only once? If that were meant, x would simply have been introduced as an item doing A. As it is, however, Socrates, in using the formulation he does, leaves open the possibility that x sometimes does not exercise its power, and that it can exercise it on more than one occasion, each time generating different offspring.

Parents are not the bundles of their offspring.¹⁶ They are *κινήσεις* that present themselves as bundles of properties and bundles of perceptions, respectively. As parents, the active and passive slow movements are the bearers of the *φερόμενα* they generate.¹⁷

4. CONCLUSION

As we saw, the standard interpretation of Protagoras' theory of flux and perceptual relativity cannot answer the question how it is that things which are changing all the time can become different without undergoing any change themselves. However, this interpretation proved to be untenable. And it turned out that in the reading of Protagoras' theory here presented the question answers itself.

A sense-property and its twin perception are the offspring of an encounter between an object and a perceiver. All these items are movements, *κινήσεις*, processes. The movements in which a sense-property and a perception consist, their *φέρεσθαι*, are not locomotion but a being borne by their parents during the encounter. They are called 'quick' because they are short-lived: as soon as the encounter is over, there is no longer a property or a perception. The movements of object and perceiver, on the other hand, are called 'slow', because they are longer-lasting. Something can become different without undergoing any change itself because it is a process, a *κίνησις*, which presents itself differently in different encounters, without undergoing an intrinsic change (*μηδὲν μεταβάλλον*). That it is "changing all the time" means that it is a permanent process like a river. Socrates characterizes such an entity, which is there even before any encounter, as neutrally as possible. Any intrinsic

¹⁶ For a comment on 158 E 7–160 C 6, relevant to this point, see van Eck 2009, 222–226; 238.

¹⁷ Note that the Secret Doctrine does not present a theory of perception. It offers an ontology of processes (*rheontology* would be a more appropriate term) that explains how things get their alleged qualities: an object is a process that in an encounter with a perceiver (being a process as well) temporarily obtains a characteristic, inextricably bound up with its perception by the perceiver. How exactly such a perception, arising during the encounter, comes about the Doctrine does not tell.

quality would constitute an independent fact of the matter, and thus open up the possibility of a perception to be erroneous and of man turning out not to be the measure of things.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

PROTAGORAS THROUGH PLATO AND ARISTOTLE: A CASE FOR THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ANCIENT RELATIVISM

Ugo Zilioli

In this contribution, I explore the treatment that Plato devotes to Protagoras' relativism in the first section of the *Theaetetus* (151 E 1–186 E 12) where, among other things, the definition that knowledge is perception is put under scrutiny. What I aim to do is to understand the subtlety of Plato's argument about Protagorean relativism and, at the same time, to assess its philosophical significance by revealing the inextricability of ontological and epistemological aspects on which it is built (for this latter aspect, I refer to contemporary discussions of relativism, mainly to Margolis' robust relativism). I then turn to Aristotle's treatment of Protagoras' relativism in *Metaphysics* Γ, sections 5 and 6, in order to show that Plato and Aristotle surprisingly share the same view as regards the philosophical content of Protagoras' relativism¹ (in doing so, I take position against the standard opinion among scholars that Plato and Aristotle understand Protagoras' relativism in different, even incompatible, ways).² What I ultimately aim to demonstrate is that Protagoras' relativism, as understood by both Plato and Aristotle, is a coherent, even attractive, philosophical position.

¹ Plato's *Theaetetus* offers the most detailed analysis of Protagoras' relativism to be found in ancient texts; whether Plato's treatment is also historically accurate is hard to tell. I have argued elsewhere (Zilioli 2007, chapter 1) that it is possible to find a weak historical plausibility in Plato's treatment of Protagoras' relativism. As far as Aristotle's treatment of Protagoras' relativism in *Metaphysics* Γ is concerned, Aristotle comments on—and develops further—some ideas of Plato's *Theaetetus*; on this point, see Lee 2005, chapter 6.

² A view like this was formulated some thirty years ago by Myles Burnyeat; see Burnyeat 1976. On the basis of this view and by using Burnyeat's labels, Protagoras is for Plato a 'relativist' (to whom every judgement is true for the person whose judgement it is), while for Aristotle he is a 'subjectivist' (to whom every judgement is true, with no further restriction); on this, see p. 246 below.

1. RELATIVISM

Before entering into Plato's treatment of Protagoras' relativism, it is sound practice to see what philosophical doctrine the word 'relativism' stands for. If one is brave enough to scrutinize all the definitions of relativism that are discussed in contemporary debates on the theme (as well as in the history of philosophy), one will end up by being eventually convinced that relativism cannot be properly defined, but that its meaning can only be shown.³ The definitions of relativism are many, even conflicting: as Paul Feyerabend once noticed, "there is just a word—'relativism'—and a (loving, or angry, but at any rate longwinded) reaction to it".⁴ Remaining at a very general level of definition, relativism can be seen as "a family of views whose common theme is that some central aspect of experience, thought, evaluation, or even reality is somehow relative to something else".⁵

The expression 'relative to' has been recently further specified by philosophers of language, some of whom are, at the moment, most interested in the formulation of coherent forms of relativism. It has been suggested that a relativistic conception of meaning and reference is what makes good sense of those situations where two people express opposite statements of taste.⁶ Here I will mention just two philosophers, John MacFarlane and Max Kölbel, who have ventured to defend a relativist conception of truth by differentiating the context of use of a statement from its context of assessment by a speaker.⁷

The differentiation between context of use and of assessment makes good sense of relativism as a viable theory of reference, meaning and truth. In the light of such a viability, this trend of thought about relativism in analytic philosophy is valuable and well worth exploring. It risks, however, to obliterate an approach to relativism that is, on my account, more capable to shed light on the special kind of relativism that Protagoras is made to maintain in Plato's *Theaetetus* (and, for that matter, in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Γ). The approach I am referring to is that adopted by Joseph Margolis, a leading American philosopher, who has expounded his views on relativism

³ I make use here of Wittgenstein's distinction between 'to say' ('sagen') and 'to show' ('zeigen') in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (4.022: ⁹1973, 35). On this distinction, see Diamond 1988 and Nordmann 2005.

⁴ Feyerabend 1987, 20.

⁵ Swoyer 2003. For a good general introduction to relativism, see also Baghramian 2004.

⁶ See MacFarlane 2007, 19–31.

⁷ See MacFarlane 2005, Kölbel 2002, and Kölbel & Garcia-Carpintero 2008.

in the book *The Truth About Relativism* (1991).⁸ Margolis holds that, to be coherent, relativism needs to be a philosophical doctrine combining epistemological as well as ontological—or metaphysical—aspects. Margolis' main point is that philosophical relativism, of the kind generally known to us as 'cognitive relativism', is not only a doctrine about (the conditions of) truth and knowledge, that is, an epistemological doctrine, but it is a more complex threefold thesis. Philosophical relativism is an *alethic* thesis (that is, a thesis that says something about the *nature* of truth), an *epistemological* thesis (which says something about the *conditions* of truth and knowledge) and an *ontological* thesis (which, by relating truth, knowledge and reality, says something about the *structure* of the world). He claims that, if taken in such a fashion, relativism is a much stronger philosophical position than its commonest formulations, namely those exemplified by the definition of relativism given above by Swoyer (and further developed by, e.g., MacFarlane and Kölbel). Margolis calls the kind of relativism he advocates 'robust relativism', where the robustness principally lies in the fact that such a type of relativism would be internally coherent in its own right and, among other things, would set relativism free from the charge of being self-refuting, the commonest charge brought against relativism since the time of Plato's *Theaetetus*.⁹

Here I will not dig deeper into Margolis' robust relativism; it may suffice to note that the inescapable combination of alethic, epistemological and metaphysical aspects that is typical of Margolis' robust relativism seems to suit well the spirit and tone of Greek philosophy,¹⁰ which is distant from the excess of specialization and professionalism that is, to some extent, typical of philosophical activity nowadays. I will accordingly use Margolis' definition of relativism as a working hypothesis for the exploration of Protagoras' relativism in the context of Plato's *Theaetetus* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Γ.

2. PROTAGORAS' RELATIVISM IN THE *THEAETETUS*

In the *Theaetetus*, Protagoras is brought into the discussion by Socrates who remarks that Theaetetus' definition that knowledge (*epistêmê*) is perception (*aisthêsis*) is equivalent to what Protagoras means when he declares that man

⁸ See also Margolis 2007a and 2007b.

⁹ See pp. 255–256 below.

¹⁰ This point is clearly noted by Jan van Ophuijsen in his Introduction to the present volume, p. 4.

is the measure of all things. Since the passage in question (*Tht.* 152 A 1–C 7) is crucial for the reconstruction of Protagoras' relativism, I will quote some brief parts of it.

Protagoras' maxim runs: "Man (*anthrôpos*) is the measure (*metron*) of all things (*chrêmatôn*), of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not (*tôn men ontôn hôs esti, tôn de mê ontôn hôs ouk estin*)" (152 A 2–4).¹¹ Socrates goes on to explain why Protagoras' maxim and Theaetetus' definition that knowledge is perception amount to the same thing. He says: "[Protagoras] puts it like this (*houtô pôs legei*), that as each thing appears to me (*hôs hoia men hekasta emoi phainetai*), so it is for me (*toiauta men estin emoi*), and as it appears to you, so it is for you (*hoia de soi, toiauta de au soi*)—you and I each being a man (*anthrôpos*)" (152 A 6–8). An example follows, to illustrate the meaning of Protagoras' maxim further. Socrates asks whether it happens that "when the same wind is blowing (*pneontos anemou tou autou*), one of us feels cold and the other does not (*ho men hemôn rhigôî, ho d'ou*)? Or that one of us feels slightly cold and the other very cold (*kai ho men êrema, ho de sphodra*)?" (152 B 2–4). Theaetetus confirms this plain fact of our everyday life; Socrates replies with an ontological question by asking in return: "Are we going to say that the wind itself, by itself (*auto eph' heautou to pneuma*), is cold or not cold? Or shall we listen to Protagoras, and say it is cold for the one who feels cold, and for the other, not cold?" (152 B 6–8). Theaetetus answers by saying that we must accept Protagoras' option; Socrates then concludes the whole argument:

The appearing of things, then, is the same as perception, in what is hot and all similar things (*phantasia ara kai aisthêsis tauton en te thermoîs kai pasi toîs toioutoîs*). So it results, apparently, that things are for the individual such as he perceives them (*hoia gar aisthanetai hekastos, toiauta hekastôi kai kinduneuei einai*). (...) Perception is always of what is, and unerring—as befits knowledge (*aisthêsis ara tou ontos aei estin kai apseudes hôs epistêmê ousa*).

Plato *Tht.* 152 C 1–6

According to Socrates' explanation, Protagoras' maxim, if interpreted as equivalent to Theaetetus' definition of knowledge as perception, means that "as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you". The example of the wind clarifies the point further. If you

¹¹ For a very informative as well as philosophically sensitive account of the meaning of 'metron' in Greek language and culture, see the contribution of Van Berkel in this collection, 37 ff. above. As for the translation of Plato's *Theaetetus*, I mainly follow that of M.J. Levett in Burnyeat 1990, 251–351, with one exception.

and I feel the same wind and you feel it as cold and I as hot, what we take to be the same wind will be cold for you and hot for me. In our everyday life it usually happens that people perceive things differently. Nobody finds this fact problematic; it might sound trivial to insist on it and to make it a philosophical position worth looking into. If we supply this fact with an ontological assumption, however, things will change. This is what Socrates does when he asks Theaetetus to follow Protagoras and say that “the wind itself, by itself (...) is cold for the one who feels cold, and for the other, not cold”.

The qualitative status of the perceived object is thus explicitly seen as depending upon the perceiver, it is relative to her: what we take to be (perceived as) the same object might be cold for someone and hot for someone else. We may call this position ‘perceptual relativism’: perceptions are always relative to the perceiver. According to perceptual relativism, each perceiver is unmistakably aware of the perceptual qualities that belong, for her, to the perceived object (its coldness and so on). The *being or not being* cold of the object is also relative to the perceiver, so that we may assume that the ontological status of the perceived object is relative to the perceiver as well (we may call this position ‘ontological relativism’). Socrates hints at this position, when he says: “things are for the individual such as he perceives them” (152 C 2–3); or when he affirms: “perception is always of what is” (152 C 5).¹² Since every perception is relative to the perceiver, it follows that ‘what is (the case / there)’ too is relative to him. During the perceptual act the perceiver (privately) establishes the ontological condition of the perceived object, its perceptual essence, so that the perceived object becomes unerringly known (by him) precisely because of the way such an essence is determined.

Taken as a theory of perceptual truth, Protagoras’ maxim is a doctrine that implies perceptual relativism, for which each perception is relative to the perceiver and is knowledge.¹³ But the key feature of Protagoras’ doctrine (interpreted as a theory of perceptual truth) is, I believe, ontological

¹² See also *Tht.* 160 C 7–9, Socrates speaking: “My perception is true for me—because it is always a perception of that being which is peculiarly mine; and I am judge, as Protagoras said, of things that are, that they are, for me; and of things that are not, that they are not”; see also 161 D 6–7: “Only the individual himself can judge of his own world, and what he judges is always true and correct”.

¹³ From perceptual cases, Protagoras’ relativism can be widened so as to include cases concerning other kinds of judgements, such as judgemental belief, judgements about states of affairs, or ethical judgements. In this article, I mainly confine myself to the treatment of perceptual cases.

relativism, on the basis of which the ontological status of the perceived object is relative to the perceiver. The perceiver is the one who, during the perceptual act, defines in some way the ontological status of the object, so that the being cold or not of the object depends upon him. Plato consciously restricts the field of ontological indeterminacy to the 'case of hot and things like that' (152 C 1–2, see above). Nonetheless, ontological relativism (or the strict and, on Protagorean grounds, unavoidable combination of perceptual and ontological relativism) is what makes the perceptual relativism derived from Protagoras' maxim an interesting doctrine; ontology, in fact, is where Plato and Protagoras could register their most drastic diversity in points of view. For Plato, it can be said summarily that things have a determinate and immutable essence; to have a proper knowledge of things amounts to knowing their changeless essence, the Forms, which are what is supremely real for Plato. Whatever ontology one might attribute to Plato, it must be a determinate and objective one: nothing is more distant from his position than the kind of ontological relativism he ascribes to Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*.

Instead of adopting an objective ontology, and in order to give legitimacy to Protagoras' doctrine stating that the wind is cold for me and not for you, Plato makes Socrates offer the alternative of another type of ontology for which "it [that is, the wind, but the specification 'itself, by itself' is not added this time] is cold for the one who feels cold, and for the other, not cold" (152 B 7). This position suggests a kind of relative ontology, for which the essence of the perceived object is relative to the single perceiver and, thus, fully depends upon him. For this type of ontology, there is no wind in itself, by itself, but there are as many kinds of wind as the number of people perceiving it. There is no universal wind to be individuated ontologically, but a plurality of them to be determined and perceived ontologically.¹⁴

On my account, therefore, ontological relativism is the key-feature of Protagoras' relativism, at least in the context of Plato's *Theaetetus*. This point is too often neglected by scholars: most commentators ascribe to Protagoras a form of perceptual relativism that is either too naïve to be philosophically interesting or is self-refuting (when it is extended to judgemental belief).¹⁵ That the picture is not so depressing seems to me clear from Plato's own

¹⁴ On the contrast between these two types of ontology, see Margolis 1991, 88–118 ("Protagoreanism and Incommensurabilism"). The drastic contrast between Plato and Protagoras in ontology can be extended to their opposite conceptions of language, knowledge and ethics. I explore such a contrast at more fully in Zilioli 2007.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Burnyeat 1990, 10–14.

treatment of Protagoras' relativism in the *Theaetetus*. An unbiased analysis of the passages we have just read shows, in fact, how ontological relativism is the philosophical fulcrum of Protagoras' relativism: this will be even more evident if Protagoras' Secret Doctrine is taken into proper account.

3. PROTAGORAS' SECRET DOCTRINE

Immediately after his explanation of the meaning of Protagoras' maxim, Socrates refers to a Secret Doctrine that Protagoras taught his pupils in secret.¹⁶ According to Socrates, the Secret Doctrine would reveal the hidden meaning of Protagoras' relativism. According to Socrates, this is what the Secret Doctrine says:

[Socrates speaking] I mean the theory that there is nothing which just by itself is one thing (*hen men auto kath' hauto*): nothing which you could rightly call anything or any kind of thing. If you call a thing large, it will reveal itself as small, and if you call it heavy, it is liable to appear as light, and so on with everything, because nothing is this or that or such and such (*hôs mêdenos ontos henos mête tinos mête hopoiououn*). What is really the case is this: the things of which we naturally say that they 'are', are in process of coming to be, as the result of movement and change and blending with one another (*ek de dê phoras te kai kinêseôs kai kraseôs pros allêla*). We are wrong when we say they 'are', since nothing ever is, but everything is always coming to be.
Plato *Tht.* 152 D 2–E 1

As has been convincingly demonstrated, Protagoras' Secret Doctrine is an amalgam of loosely related philosophical positions, centred on two main metaphysical theses: 1) nothing in itself is just one thing (theory of ontological indeterminacy); 2) everything is coming to be (theory of flux).¹⁷ Whichever thesis (1 or 2) one may favour as best explaining the hidden meaning of Protagoras' relativism, there is no doubt that it is a *metaphysical* thesis, namely a thesis that says something about the world, something on how the world is or at least how it appears to be. Even at a first glance, Protagoras' Secret Doctrine will confirm that Plato conceives of Protagoras' relativism as both an epistemological and an ontological position. Protagoras' relativism is an epistemological position because it says that (perceptual) knowledge is, in some sense, relative to the knower; it is also an ontological position because it explains why knowledge is relative to the knower by postulating

¹⁶ For this section especially, cp. Van Eck, 217 ff. in this volume.

¹⁷ See Lee 2005, Chapter 5, especially 5.3.

that, on the basis of Protagoras' Secret Doctrine, in the world of macroscopic objects the knower is daily confronted with, everything is coming to be (theory of flux) and/or nothing is just one thing (theory of ontological indeterminacy).

Plato makes Socrates offer a further development of Protagoras' Secret Doctrine by sketching a theory of perception, where the theory of flux and that of ontological indeterminacy are intermixed together once again. The passage runs:

[SOC.]: In the case of eyes, first, you mustn't think of what you call white colour as being some distinct thing outside your eyes or even in your eyes (*kata ta ommata prôton, ho dê kaleis chrôma leukon, mê einai auto heteron ti exô tôn sôn ommatôn mêd' en tois ommasi*)—in fact you mustn't assign any place to it; because in that case it would, surely, be at its assigned place and in a state of rest, rather than *coming to be*.

[THEAET.]: Well, how can I think of it?

[SOC.]: Let's follow what we said just now, and lay it down that *nothing is one thing just by itself* (*mêden auto kath' hauto hen on*). On those lines, we will find that black, white, or any other colour will turn out to have come into being, from the collision of eyes with the appropriate motion. What colour we will say each thing is will be neither that which collides, nor what it collides with, but something intermediate between the two of them (*ho dê hekaston einai phamen chrôma oute to prosballon oute to prosballomenon estai, alla metaxu ti hekastôi*) that has come to being as peculiar to them (*idion gegonos*). Or would you be prepared to insist that every colour appears to a dog, or any other living thing, just the way it appears to you?

[THEAET.]: Certainly not.

[SOC.]: And what about another man? Is the way anything appears to him like the way it appears to you? Can you insist on that? Or wouldn't you much rather say that it doesn't appear like the same even to yourself, because you yourself are never in the same condition as yourself (*ê polu mallon hoti oude soi autôi tauton dia to mêdepote homoiôs auton seautôi echein*)?

[THEAET.]: Yes, I think that's nearer the truth than the first alternative.

Plato *Thet.* 153 D 8–154 A 9 (translation McDowell)

The kernel of the passage, at least as far as a theory of perception is concerned, is that a perception, namely a given colour, is something 'peculiar', indeed private (*idion*) to both the perceiver and the perceived object. This peculiar privacy is what makes relativity the philosophical fulcrum of the passage under scrutiny: the perceived object and the perceiver are necessarily correlative in the perceptual act, in so far as the former requires the presence of the latter both epistemologically and ontologically. The perceived object can be properly said to exist and to be perceptible when it is related

to someone who perceives it;¹⁸ moreover, the perceiver comes to know the perceived object as it appears to him to be by establishing a private connection with the object. The theory of perception thus illustrated by Socrates is clearly centred on relativity; yet it is ambiguous on flux and indeterminacy. Does the kind of relativity Socrates develops out of Protagoras' Secret Doctrine rest upon flux or indeterminacy?

A traditional reading of the logical linkage between Protagoras' relativism and the Secret Doctrine is to maintain that perceptual knowledge is relative to the perceiver because everything is coming to be (theory of flux), that is, the theory of flux works as the metaphysical background of Protagoras' relativism (call this interpretation A). To go back to Socrates' initial example, you and I have different perceptions of the wind that is blowing. We are both infallible in our perceptions of the blowing wind; the different perceptions are both cases of perceptual knowledge because, as the Secret Doctrine theory of perception tells us, each and every perception is generated by the causal encounter of the perceived object and the perceiving subject. On this interpretation, the causal encounter between object and subject in the perceptual process is due to both of them *not being* 'something' and 'somebody', but *becoming* something for somebody (at a given moment). A further development of Protagoras' Secret Doctrine will indeed show that changes and alterations things and people undergo could be so drastic that we would not be even allowed to speak of a perceiving subject and a perceived object.¹⁹ In this picture, therefore, there is relativity: the perceptual subject and object are peculiarly and privately interrelated in the perceptual act, and the latter presupposes the former (both epistemologically and ontologically). This kind of relativity is based on a theory of flux that makes everything and everybody changing so quickly that, so to speak, a momentary and instantaneous stability is obtained only in the perceptual act.

Alternatively, one can maintain that the logical interrelation between Protagoras' relativism and the Secret Doctrine is that perceptual knowledge is relative to the perceiver because nothing in itself is just one thing (theory of ontological indeterminacy; call this interpretation B). On the basis of this interpretation, macroscopic objects in the world are ontologically indeterminate and do not possess any ontological features on their own;

¹⁸ This point will become more evident once we are faced with Aristotle's treatment of Protagoras' relativism; see below, section 6.

¹⁹ See *Tht.* 156 A 7–C 3, where the self is seen as dissolved into the series of its momentary perceptions and the object into perceived ideas. On this radicalization, see Van Eck, esp. 222 ff. in this volume.

they get some only in so far as they become perceived by a perceiver. A contemporary philosopher here would perhaps like to refer to some theory of vagueness, or to what has been called the 'Cosmic Porridge View' by Robert Kirk; for an ancient mind, a reference to Anaxagoras' idea that everything is mixed in everything may be helpful.²⁰ In this alternative picture, there is again relativity (as in interpretation A), for the perceiver and the perceived object are in that kind of peculiar and private correlation *Theaetetus* 153 D 8–154 A 9 speaks of. In this interpretation, however, relativity is based upon ontological indeterminacy, not upon any theory of flux: in the perceptual act, the perceived object and the perceiver establish a peculiar and private relation because this is the only way in which the perceived object comes out from its ontological indeterminacy and becomes ontologically determinate in relation (*pros ti*) to someone. In this picture, the perceived object is ontologically unstable not because it is in constant flux, but because it is indeterminate by nature. In short, the object in itself does not have a determinate essence. It does acquire an essence when it comes into relation with a perceiver. To borrow an example from contemporary philosophy, Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit head drawn on a piece of paper can be seen as a rabbit head by someone and as a duck head by someone else; both perceivers are correct and the figure 'duck-rabbit head' is correctly determined as a duck head in one case and, correctly again, as a rabbit head in the other case. There is no way to say what the picture 'duck-rabbit head' actually represents if not in the relative way just illustrated.²¹

As we have seen, the relativity we ascribe to Protagoras' relativism in the Secret Doctrine is, on one possible interpretation (A), imputed to a theory of flux; on another possible interpretation (B), the same relativity is seen as dependent upon ontological indeterminacy. A further exploration of the section of Conflicting Appearances and of Protagoras' Defence in the *Theaetetus* would reveal how important the perceptual conditions of the perceiving subject are in the context of Plato's treatment of Protagoras' relativism in that

²⁰ Kirk describes the 'Cosmic Porridge View' as follows: "All that really exists (...) is an indeterminate something, and—the key component of the idea—this something has no features of its own: the porridge is undifferentiated. Instead, we somehow impose features on it (...). On the one hand, something really exists 'out there', but on the other hand nothing else can be said about it which is objectively true (...). Sticks and stones, atoms and electrons, stars and clouds are our constructions in the strong sense that there is no more to their existence than the fact that we have imposed those particular concepts on the otherwise indeterminate stuff, the cosmic porridge itself" (Kirk 1999, 52). On Anaxagoras, see DK 59 B 1, II.32.7–16 and p. 254 below.

²¹ On the 'duck-rabbit' head, see Wittgenstein 1953, IIxi, 194/194^e.

dialogue. Such an additional exploration would make interpretation B more plausible than A, while strengthening the philosophical coherence of the former. In the light of this suggestion, fully developed elsewhere,²² a perceiver and the corresponding perceived object establish a peculiar and private link that is at the base of Protagoras' relativism: the perceiver always perceives the object under certain peculiar perceptual conditions, not because there are perennial changes around.

Not only does interpretation B make Protagoras' relativism a more viable and coherent option (for a coherent relativist is well prepared to reject any theory of flux as a sound basis of his relativism),²³ but such an interpretation is also more in accord with other ancient treatments of Protagoras' relativism. In his analysis of Protagoras' relativism in the *Theaetetus*, Plato focuses the attention of the reader on the first alternative (interpretation A), because this brings with it some philosophical consequences that are hard to accept, summarily referred to earlier.²⁴ The second alternative (interpretation B) remains in the background in that dialogue, but it is the one Plato favours in the *Cratylus* (where he deals with Protagoras once again).²⁵ On his part, Sextus Empiricus offers his understanding of Protagoras' relativism by articulating its philosophical core into ontological indeterminacy (and relativity).²⁶

Aristotle is on this same line when he deals with Protagoras' relativism. I now turn to Aristotle and his interpretation of Protagoras' relativism because his interpretation is rich in philosophical details and also reflects Aristotle's own evaluation of Plato's arguments about Protagoras' relativism in the *Theaetetus*. As said above, a second reason for focusing on Aristotle is that his treatment of Protagoras' relativism is traditionally taken to differ from Plato's treatment in the *Theaetetus*. What I aim to show in the next sections is that there is no discrepancy between Aristotle's and Plato's treatment of Protagoras' relativism and that this agreement rests upon the articulation of such relativism into a form of robust relativism, where relativity (based upon ontological indeterminacy) plays a key role.

²² See Zilioli 2007, 44–54.

²³ As ancient and more recent discussions have convincingly shown, there is no philosophical necessity for relativism to adopt any theory of movement and ontological change to defend its own plausibility; indeed, such theories work against this plausibility: see Lee 2005, Chapter II and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Γ 5.1010 a 35–b 1 (253 ff. below).

²⁴ See pp. 240–241 above. On the impossibility of language as one of such consequences, see *Th.* 179 E 3–183 C 3 and Sedley 2003.

²⁵ See *Crat.* 385 E 4–386 A 4 and 386 D 8–E 4.

²⁶ See *Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes* 1.216–219. In particular, Sextus offers further evidence for the importance and role of perceptual conditions in the context of Protagoras' relativism: see 1.217–218 and *Adversus Mathematicos* 7.62–63.

4. ARISTOTLE, PROTAGORAS AND THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-CONTRADICTION

Aristotle treats Protagoras' relativism in the context of his discussion of the Principle of Non-Contradiction (hereafter, PNC) in sections 3–6 of *Metaphysics* Γ; in particular, he focuses on Protagoras' relativism in sections 5 and 6 (although there are strong exegetical reasons for reading section 4 as providing the basis for the arguments he advances in sections 5 and 6 against Protagoras).²⁷

In *Metaphysics* Γ Aristotle offers three versions of PNC: "For the same thing to hold good and not to hold good simultaneously of the same thing and in the same respect is impossible (*to gar auto hama huparchein te kai mê huparchein adunaton tôi autôi kai kata to auto*)" (1005 b 19–20 = PNC₁);²⁸ the second version is as follows: "It is impossible for anyone to suppose that the same thing is and is not (*adunaton gar hontinoûn tauton hupolambanein einai kai mê einai*)" (1005 b 23–24 = PNC₂). The third and last version is to be found at 1011 b 13–14: "the opinion that opposite assertions are not simultaneously true is the firmest of all (*bebaiotatê doxa pasôn to mê einai alêtheis hama tas antikeimenas phaseis*)" (PNC₃). PNC₁ is a metaphysical or ontological version of PNC, for it states a principle about how things in the world are and must be; PNC₂ is a psychological and epistemological version of PNC, since it states a principle about how our beliefs and judgements are or must be;²⁹ PNC₃ is a logical version of PNC, since it states a principle about how our linguistic assertions must be.

Although he offers three versions of the same principle or different ways to apply the same principle to key areas of philosophy, it is clear from the arguments of *Metaphysics* Γ 3–6 that Aristotle is most concerned with PNC as mainly PNC₁ (that is, as a principle that shows how things are and must be) and, consequently, with PNC as PNC₂ (that is, as a principle that shows how we think, and have to think, of things). Of course, how things are and

²⁷ See Gottlieb 1994.

²⁸ After enunciating PNC₁, Aristotle adds the following specifications: "given any further specifications which might be added against the dialectical difficulties", which he further specifies at 1011 a 22–24. See also *De int.* 17 a 33–37 and *Soph. El.* 167 a 23–27; and compare Plato, *Resp.* 436 D 4–E 7. As for the translation of *Metaphysics* Γ, I mainly follow Kirwan ²1993.

²⁹ It is not clear whether PNC₂ is to be viewed as a descriptive claim about human psychology or as a normative one, that is, about what it is rational to believe; on this point, see Gottlieb 1994, 2–3. For a powerful critique of Aristotle's discussion of PNC in the *Metaphysics*, see Priest 1998 and 2003.

how we think of them is, so to speak, reflected in how we speak of them, so the discussion of PNC₁ and PNC₂ involves discussing PNC₃. Since according to him PNC is the firmest of all principles of reasoning and reality, Aristotle does not claim to be able to prove it, since the eventual demonstration of PNC would have to rest on something more fundamental than PNC and this is impossible.³⁰ What Aristotle aims to do, then, is to defend PNC by first identifying the philosophical views of those philosophers who do not accept PNC and by later showing that such views are inconsistent. The main philosophical views that Aristotle identifies in this way are two: one is phenomenalism (the view that all appearances and beliefs are true), the other is relativism (the view that all appearances and beliefs are true for those who hold them). In the course of his analysis and critique of them, Aristotle treats such philosophical positions as mainly metaphysical positions and/or as epistemological positions. In short, Aristotle treats phenomenalism and relativism as mainly metaphysical and epistemological positions and, hence, his defence of PNC is mainly, although not exclusively, a defence of PNC as PNC₁ and as PNC₂.

The characterization, on Aristotle's part, of the defence of PNC as the defence of PNC₁ and PNC₂ not only marks a great difference with contemporary discussions of PNC (where PNC is conceived of as mainly a law of thought and language, that is, as PNC₂ and PNC₃), but it also signals from the very start that what is being discussed in Aristotle's defence of PNC are views like phenomenalism and relativism, which are mainly metaphysical and, at the same time, epistemological views. Since Protagoras is the key figure against whom Aristotle builds up his defence of PNC and to whom Aristotle ascribes both phenomenalism and relativism, this shows that, like Plato in the *Theaetetus*, Aristotle believes that Protagoras' doctrine is a combined metaphysical and epistemological doctrine and, hence, a robust philosophical doctrine (to go back to Margolis' label). Whether this robust doctrine is a form of robust relativism will become clear from a brief analysis of the treatment of phenomenalism and relativism Aristotle offers in his defence of PNC.

The doctrine of Protagoras is mentioned at the beginning of section 5; Aristotle clearly identifies it with phenomenalism, namely with the view that all appearances and beliefs are true.³¹ He connects Protagoras' doctrine with

³⁰ See 1005 b 8–34; 1005 b 35–1006 a 27.

³¹ 1009 a 6–8: according to Aristotle, the view of Protagoras is the view that “all things believed (*ta dokounta panta*) and all appearances (*ta phainomena*) are true”. See also 1011 a 18 and 19–20, where Aristotle prefers the shorter “all appearances are true” as the characterization

the negation of PNC: if all that is believed or perceived is true, “it is necessary that everything is simultaneously true and false”, that is to say, PNC is not true, since “many people have mutually contrary beliefs, and regard those whose opinions are not the same as their own as in error, so that it is necessary that the same thing should both be and not be [i.e., PNC₁ is not true of things]” (1009 a 9–12). This is plainly true; Aristotle notes that the converse also holds: if everything is simultaneously true and false, then every appearance and belief is, at the same time, both true and false. By this argument Aristotle establishes the full logical equivalence between phenomenalism and the negation of PNC.³² Further, he notes that both these views come “from the same thinking” (*apo tês autês ... dianoias*, 1009 a 15–16)—although he does not immediately say what this thinking amounts to.

Aristotle’s identification of Protagoras’ doctrine as a form of phenomenalism on the basis of which all appearances and beliefs are true (with no further specification) strikes any reader of Plato’s *Theaetetus* who is well acquainted with the idea that Protagoras’ doctrine amounts to a form of relativism. Burnyeat observes: “after Plato (...), in Aristotle, Sextus Empiricus, and the later sources generally, Protagoras is understood rather differently: not as a relativist but as a subjectivist whose view is that every judgement is true *simpliciter*—true absolutely, not merely true for the person whose judgement it is”.³³ Although in a footnote Burnyeat added some qualifications and restrictions,³⁴ his view became a standard opinion as far as the characterization of Protagoras’ doctrine in antiquity is concerned. Elsewhere in this volume Noburu Notomi well illustrates this view by depicting two interpretations of Protagoras’ doctrine in doxography, one leading to phenomenalism and the other to relativism.³⁵ I agree with both Burnyeat and Notomi that, on the standard interpretation, ancient sources offer two seemingly alternative accounts of Protagoras’ doctrine, that is, relativism and phenomenalism. I claim, however, that, on another kind of interpretation, these seemingly alternative accounts can be reduced to one, since phenomenalism inevitably leads to relativism. This is at least Aristotle’s strategy in *Metaphysics* Γ 6.

of phenomenalism.

³² Alexander (*In Arist. Met.* 1009 a 6, 301.31–302.29 Hayduck) offers further arguments in support of Aristotle’s identification between the two views; for a possible weakness in Aristotle’s argument, see Kirwan ²1993, 106.

³³ Burnyeat 1976, 46.

³⁴ Burnyeat 1976, 46 n. 3.

³⁵ Section 3 of his article (*‘The homo mensura Thesis in Doxography’*), 25 ff. above.

5. THE ARGUMENT FROM CONFLICTING APPEARANCES IN ARISTOTLE'S *METAPHYSICS*

As we have seen, the thesis of Protagoras that all appearances and beliefs are true is brought into discussion at the beginning of Γ 5, where Aristotle equates it with the negation of PNC. According to Aristotle, both views, phenomenalism and the negation of PNC, stem from the same *dianoia* ('thinking': 1009 a 16). This thinking is further linked with the observation of perceptible things at 1009 a 23 (where the negation of PNC is being discussed) and at 1009 b 1 (where phenomenalism is under scrutiny). Aristotle gives further specifications on such thinking at 1010 a 1–3: "What caused these people [i.e., the phenomenalists] to hold their opinion was that, in searching for the truth about the things-that-are, they assumed that the things-that-are are the perceptibles exclusively (*ta d' onta hupelabon einai ta aisthêta monon*)". Aristotle thus believes that phenomenalists such as Protagoras come to hold their view that (a) all appearances are true because they believe that (b) all that exists is perceptible and that knowledge is perception. Following Aristotle I, in fact, interpret (b), that is the thinking behind phenomenalism, mainly as a metaphysical claim (about the nature of the things that are) with an epistemological consequence (that perception is knowledge).³⁶ This is the first time in *Metaphysics* Γ that a thesis openly discussed in connection with Protagoras' doctrine in Plato's *Theaetetus* ('Theaetetus' second definition of knowledge as perception) explicitly comes into Aristotle's discussion of Protagoras.

Like Protagoras of Plato's *Theaetetus*, on whom we focused in the earlier sections, Protagoras of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* seems to believe that perception is the key element on which a philosophical discussion of knowledge should be centred and that perceptual processes are processes in which actual knowledge is gained. This is just one first linkage one can find between Plato's treatment of Protagoras' relativism in the *Theaetetus* and Aristotle's analysis of Protagoras' view that all appearances are true in *Metaphysics* Γ . Another linkage between the two related discussions is provided by the argument from Conflicting Appearances. View (b), that all that exists is perceptible and perception is knowledge, is not enough for someone to hold (a), that is, that all appearances are true. In order to hold (a), one has in fact to supply (b) with

³⁶ On the double (epistemological and metaphysical) nature of the philosophical view Aristotle believes to be the source of phenomenalism, see Lee 2005, 177–179, and Politis 2004, 163.

(c), the argument from Conflicting Appearances. All appearances are true (a) if and only if all that exists is perceptible/ perception is knowledge (b) and perceptions are different, in conflict, yet all epistemologically legitimate (c).

The argument from Conflicting Appearances appears for the first time in the history of philosophy in Plato's *Theaetetus*, in support of Protagoras' relativism;³⁷ by borrowing it, Aristotle makes the argument a crucial step for those who aim to maintain Protagoras' doctrine coherently. In *Metaphysics* Γ, the argument from Conflicting Appearances is introduced at 1009 a 38–b 11 and goes as follows:

So, too, from perceptible things some derive the truth of what appears. For they consider that it is inappropriate to judge truth by large and small numbers, but the same thing is thought sweet by some who taste it and bitter by others; so that if everyone were ill or everyone were out of his mind and only two or three people were healthy or sane, the latter would be thought ill and out of their minds and not the others. Again, [they say] that the same things appear in contrary ways to many of the other animals and to us, and even as perceived by each person they are not always thought the same. Which kinds of these, therefore, are true or false is unclear; for it is not the case that some are more true than others; they are equally so (*outhen mallon tade ê tade alêthê, all' homoiôs*).

On the basis of this argument, it is impossible to single out what appearance or perception is the truest among conflicting ones. Could it be philosophically plausible to say which is the most authoritative appearance on the basis of "large and small numbers" (argument from majority)? Aristotle answers it is not, since the majority of people could be ill or out of their mind (difference between states of mind and between health and illness). Moreover, how could we discriminate between what appears to animals and what appears to humans, since these appearances do differ (difference in perception between animals and humans)? Even when we speak of a single person, how can we grade, from the point of view of their truth, his appearances, since they differ so significantly (perceptual variability within a single person)? Since no criterion seems available, it is possible to conclude, Aristotle argues, that each appearance is always authoritative and correct.³⁸

³⁷ See *Tht.* 154 A 6–9 (p. 240 above) and 157 E 1–159 A 9.

³⁸ The argument from Conflicting Appearances is what allows some scholars to interpret Protagoras' relativism as a philosophical ancestor of ancient scepticism: see the last lines of Aristotle's passage (1009 b 10–11), where the '*ou mallon*' formula, later codified by scepticism, is openly introduced. On the history of the argument from Conflicting Appearances in ancient scepticism, see Annas & Barnes 1985.

The authoritativeness of each perception is the point also stressed by Socrates when he finishes to illustrate the meaning of Protagoras' maxim at *Theaetetus* 152 C 5–6: "Perception, then, is always of what is, and unerring—as befits knowledge." The argument from Conflicting Appearances that Aristotle reports in the *Metaphysics* reflects quite closely the one Plato offers in the *Theaetetus*, where much is said about the impossibility of finding a criterion for discriminating between the truthfulness of the perceptions of those who are mad and sane, or healthy and ill (difference between states of mind and between health and illness). In these sections of the *Theaetetus*, Plato makes Socrates also expound the Dream argument, questioning what criterion we can offer to discern dreams from real life (158 A 9–D 7). None, according to Socrates; this is why the perceptions of those who are asleep and those who are awake are, again, equally authoritative. In his version of the argument of Conflicting Appearances, Aristotle does not directly highlight the asleep/awake dichotomy, but this surfaces in two other places in the discussion of Protagoras' doctrine in sections 5 and 6 of *Metaphysics* Γ (at 1010 b 8–9 and 1011 a 6–7 respectively), where in both cases such a dichotomy is placed in the context of an argument in support of phenomenalism, namely the doctrine that Aristotle initially attributes to Protagoras.³⁹

Other sub-arguments that form the backbone of Aristotle's version of the argument from Conflicting Appearances can be traced back to the *Theaetetus*. The perceptual variability within the perceptions of a single person is, in fact, invoked at *Theaetetus* 154 A 6–7 as an argument in favour of Protagoras' Secret Doctrine; the perceptual difference between animals and humans is polemically brought into discussion by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, when he glosses on Protagoras' maxim that man is the measure.⁴⁰ The only sub-argument Aristotle employs in his version of the argument of Conflicting Appearances that is employed rather differently by Plato, is the argument from majority: Plato refers to it in the *Theaetetus*, but to argue against Protagoras, not in favour of him.⁴¹

³⁹ It is worth noting that, differently from Plato who offers no criterion for discriminating between dream and real life, Aristotle offers one: those who ask on what ground we discriminate dream from real life show through *their own behaviours and actions* that they do believe that there is a difference between these two conditions (see 1010 b 9–11; 1011 a 8–11).

⁴⁰ See *Tht.* 161 C 4–6 [Socrates speaking]: "I was astonished that he [Protagoras] did not state at the beginning of the Truth that "Pig is the measure of all things" or "Baboon" or some yet more out-of-the-way creature with the power of perception".

⁴¹ See *Tht.* 170 C 2–171 A 5, where Plato begins his self-refutation argument against Protagoras.

Both Plato and Aristotle thus employ the argument from Conflicting Appearances in support of Protagoras' doctrine. What is striking is that in his elaboration of the argument, Aristotle relies heavily on Plato's original version of the argument, as the cross-references supplied clearly show. Once again, this demonstrates how well acquainted with Plato's treatment of Protagoras' doctrine Aristotle is. It is highly improbable that, on the basis of the same cluster of arguments, Aristotle depicts Protagoras quite differently from Plato. In short, it seems implausible that on the basis of the very same series of arguments, the one (Plato) understands Protagoras as a relativist, the other (Aristotle) as a phenomenalist. In the light of the awareness of how much Aristotle borrowed from Plato,⁴² a closer look at one argument in *Metaphysics* Γ 6 will show that, for Aristotle too, Protagoras is a relativist, for, according to Aristotle, the view underlying phenomenism is relativism.

6. THE ROOT OF PHENOMENALISM AND RELATIVISM: RELATIVISM

Metaphysics Γ 6 begins with Aristotle's objection to the Dream argument, and soon we find Aristotle providing the connection between phenomenism and relativism. Aristotle says:

But if it is not the case that all things are relative (*pros ti*), but there are also some things that are themselves by themselves (*auta kath' hauta*), then it will not be the case that all appearance is true (*ouk an eiê pan to phainomenon alêthes*). For an appearance is an appearance for someone (*to gar phainomenon tini esti phainomenon*). So those who claim that all appearances are true make all being relative (*hôte ho legôn hapanta ta phainomena einai alêthê hapanta poiei ta onta pros ti*). For this reason, too, those who want to trace the force of the argument, and who at the same time are prepared to submit to argument, must take care to assert not that appearance is true [i.e., phenomenism], but rather that appearance is true to the one to whom it appears, and at the time when it appears, and in the respect in which it appears, and in the way in which it appears (*hoti ou to phainomenon estin alla to phainomenon hoi phainetai kai hote phainetai kai hêi kai hôs*) [i.e., relativism]. Arist. *Met.* 1011 a 17–24

Before attempting to understand the reasons why Aristotle believes that relativism is the source of phenomenism, it is worth stressing that the first half of the passage just quoted provides us with a metaphysical argument:

⁴² There are traces of Platonic borrowings also in the critique of the argument from Conflicting Appearances Aristotle puts forward at 1010 b 2–1011 a 2. Of course, in Aristotle's critique there is something else (the causal theory of perception, 1010 b 31–1011 a 2) that is not to be found in Plato.

Aristotle speaks of things and beings that are relative (1011 a 17 and 20), contrasted with things that are themselves by themselves, namely things that are what they are in virtue of themselves and not in virtue of the relation they have with other things (1011 a 17–18). The contrast here is between what I have earlier referred to as ontological relativism (with regard to Protagoras' ontology) and ontological objectivism (with regard to Plato's ontology).⁴³ In light of this ontological distinction, the second half of the passage offers an epistemological argument: here Aristotle suggests to the phenomenalist some specifications he had better adopt to avoid trouble when he declares that every appearance is true. Those specifications (person, time, respect, way), initially referred to when Aristotle first formulates PNC (1005 b 18–21), are such as to make the phenomenalist a full relativist. On the basis of this passage, it is clear that Aristotle shows again that phenomenalism and relativism are both ontological and, at the same time, epistemological positions. But why does phenomenalism lead to relativism?

Later in section 6, Aristotle goes back to these specifications a phenomenalist has to add to his pronouncements in order not to get caught in contradictions (1011 b 3). He adds: "Indeed, as was said before [1011 a 21–24, the passage just quoted], it is necessary [for the phenomenalist] to make everything relative to something, i.e., to opinion and perception, so that nothing either has come to be or will be without someone first having that opinion; and if things have come to be or will be, it is plain that not everything can be relative to opinion" (1011 b 4–7). A comment of Alexander on this passage helps us to understand the point of the whole matter:

For this [i.e., the idea that all things are relative] follows for one who refers the essence (*ousia*) of beings to the opinion of the one opining and to the sense-perception of the one perceiving by sense, and who says that that which appears to each person is true. But if the essence of all beings is relative, and if their existence is consequent upon the opinions of those who opine and on their appearances and sense-perceptions, then neither does anything exist for someone unless someone opines that it exists, nor will anything exist unless someone first opines anything concerning it. For for things whose being consists in appearing and in being opined, their coming to pass (*ginesthai*) also consists in being opined. But if coming to pass consists in being opined, then so does having come to pass (*gegonenai*). Hence for someone who does not opine that something is coming to pass, it does not come to pass either. But nothing could come to pass at all, unless it is opined as coming to pass; and each thing would exist so long as it was opined. For it is opinion and appearance that

⁴³ See p. 238 above.

make the things that appear and that are opined, things which previously did not exist.⁴⁴

Alex. Aphr. *In Arist. Met.* 322.20–29 Hayduck

As Alexander's comment makes indubitably clear, at 1011 b 4–7 Aristotle conceives of relativism as an idealist or antirealist doctrine: the existence of things depends on their being perceived (or opined) by a perceiver (ontological claim) and the perception (broadly understood so as to include opinions) of this perceiver is also knowledge of the things in question (epistemological claim).⁴⁵ Curiously enough, Aristotle too makes phenomenalism an idealist or antirealist doctrine. When at 1010 b 2–1011 a 2 he gives his counterarguments to phenomenalism, he ends by saying the following:

In general, if in fact only the perceptible exists [the thinking that lies behind the negation of PNC and phenomenalism], nothing would exist unless living things existed; for there would be no perception. Now it is doubtlessly true that neither perceptible things nor sense-impressions (which are an affection of a perceiver) would exist; but that the subjects which produce perception would not exist, even in the absence of perception, is impossible. For perception is not of itself, but there is some other thing too apart from perception, which is necessarily prior to perception; for what changes something is prior in nature to the thing changed, and this is so no less even if they are called these things with reference to one another.

Arist. *Met.* 1010 b 30–1011 a 2

Aristotle here criticizes phenomenalism by adopting a causal theory of perception that makes the objects of perception prior (as regards their existence) to the perception of the perceiver who perceives them. He does so because he believes that phenomenalism is a form of idealism that takes the world to be as not existent prior to our own perception of it. This makes the existence of the objects of perceptions be dependant upon the presence of a perceiver (ontological claim), as well as making the perception of the perceiver, *qua* itself, knowledge of the perceived object.⁴⁶

Aristotle therefore seems to believe that phenomenalism leads to relativism because they both have the same root, that is, idealism or antirealism; in particular, if one thinks deeply about phenomenalism, one will soon be

⁴⁴ As for Alexander's *Commentary* on book Γ of the *Metaphysics*, I follow Madigan's translation (1993), with some adaptations.

⁴⁵ I will not here go further into distinguishing idealism and antirealism. If I would do so, I would be faced with a tricky issue. For my purposes here, it is enough to note that Aristotle (as Plato does) treats relativism and phenomenalism as two views opposing realism.

⁴⁶ Again Alexander is of some help when he comments on this passage: "What he says could also be said in reply to the view of Protagoras, who, thinking that only things perceived by sense exist, said that things perceived by sense were produced in some sort of relation of sense-perception to external things; this is why Protagoras said that a thing is for each person such as it appears to him" (*In Arist. Met.* 316.11–15 Hayduck). Alexander explicitly connects

persuaded that relativism best represents the philosophical features that are typical of phenomenalism. As seen at 1010 b 31–1011 a 2, when he criticizes it by offering a causal theory of perception, Aristotle characterizes phenomenalism as an idealist doctrine, where the object of perception and the perceiver “are called these things with reference to one another (*pros allêla*)” (1011 a 1–2). The object of perception and the perceiver are, in the context of phenomenalism, correlative in so far as the former presupposes the latter. (This correlativeness is the kernel of phenomenalism as a form of idealism.) But if this is the case, Aristotle observes, the best doctrine that puts correlativeness at its core is relativism, where each thing is supposed to be conceived and understood only in relation to another. As Aristotle initially put it (1011 a 17–18), if things are not themselves by themselves but are relative, this will make every appearance true, for an appearance is always an appearance for someone.

7. PLATO AND ARISTOTLE SHARING THE SAME VIEW ON PROTAGORAS’ DOCTRINE

On the account I have just expounded, Aristotle treats phenomenalism as a position inevitably leading to relativism; he also views these two philosophical positions as involving both metaphysical and epistemological commitments. For Aristotle too, then, Protagoras is best represented as a relativist; in particular, the correlativeness that Aristotle makes so central in his account of Protagoras’ (perceptual) doctrine strictly resembles the kind of perceptual and ontological relativism that Plato, in my view, ascribes to Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. As we have seen, in that dialogue Protagoras is depicted as embracing a form of perceptual relativism, for which each perception is knowledge and is relative to the perceiver who has it (perceptual relativism). The key-feature of such relativism is ontological, on the basis of which the ontological status of the perceived object is relative to the perceiver (ontological relativism). Moreover, in my interpretation of Protagoras’ Secret Doctrine in the context of Plato’s *Theaetetus*, I have offered reasons for further specifying ontological relativism as ontological indeterminacy, on the basis of which nothing in itself is any one thing. By adopting such an interpretation, I have rejected the traditional reading of the Secret Doctrine as exclusively centred on a Heraclitean theory of flux and change.⁴⁷

Aristotle’s passage to Protagoras’ doctrine and qualifies it, on the basis of what Aristotle says, as a form of idealist phenomenalism (both metaphysical and epistemological) ultimately leading to relativism.

⁴⁷ See pp. 241–242 above.

In his treatment of Protagoras, Aristotle refers to all the philosophical features Plato himself attributes to the sophist in the *Theaetetus*. Firstly, Aristotle understands Protagoras as maintaining a theory about perception, indeed as holding the position that knowledge is perception, that is, the view that Socrates equates with Protagoras' doctrine at *Theaetetus* 151 E 6–8. Secondly, the correlativeness that Aristotle makes so central in the doctrine of Protagoras is what makes each perception, or appearance, relative to the individual perceiver (perceptual relativism). The idealist or antirealist connotation of such correlativeness is what makes clear that, in the context of Protagoras' doctrine, the existence of the objects of perception is not ontologically prior to the act of perception. This being the case, the perceiver establishes the ontological status of the perceived object during the perceptual act by, for instance, ascribing a particular accident or property to it (ontological relativism). Thirdly, Aristotle is well aware that Protagoras' doctrine supports ontological indeterminacy: the idealist connotation he attaches to the doctrine of Protagoras throughout sections 5 and 6 of *Metaphysics* Γ is a clear sign of this. He also often refers openly to the doctrine of Protagoras as implying that things are ontologically indeterminate (*aorista*); indeed, the only way to deny coherently PNC for Protagoras and every phenomenalist who adopts his views is to hold that things are ontologically indeterminate.⁴⁸

Moreover, Aristotle considers the theory of flux, of a Heraclitean kind, as one of those views that spring from the idea that all that exists is perceptible/ that knowledge is perception (1010 a 7–1010 b 1). After he diagnoses the defects of the view, he ends by saying: “Yet the consequence of maintaining simultaneously that things are and are not [i.e., phenomenism, the view initially ascribed to Protagoras by Aristotle] is really to assert that all are at rest, rather than changing; for there is nothing for things to alter into, for everything exists in everything (*apanta gar huparchei pasin*)” (1010 a 35–1010 b 1: Kirwan's translation modified in the last line). On Aristotle's account, the theory of flux is incompatible with phenomenism (hence with relativism, to which phenomenism ultimately leads). This is so because, on the basis of those doctrines, everything exists in everything, which is the view of Anaxagoras, the closest analogue in antiquity of ontological indeterminacy. In this way Aristotle adds to the strength of interpretation B of Protagoras' doctrine (in the context of Plato's *Theaetetus*) as sketched earlier:

⁴⁸ For such passages, see 1007 b 17–28; 1009 a 25–27; 1010 a 2–4. On ontological indeterminacy as a fundamental view to adopt for those who reject PNC, see Politis 2004, 156–187.

for Aristotle, ontological indeterminacy is in full accord with relativism and phenomenalism, while the theory of flux is extraneous to, indeed incompatible with, those doctrines.

In *Metaphysics* Γ Aristotle, therefore, does interpret Protagoras as a relativist; he also attributes to Protagoras' doctrine the same basic features that Plato attributes to it in the *Theaetetus*. A further inquiry into the possible parallelism between the arguments of *Theaetetus* 151 E 1–186 E 12 and those of *Metaphysics* Γ, sections 4 to 6, would reveal the close kinship between the two treatments of Protagoras' doctrine presented by Plato and Aristotle respectively. In particular, it could be argued that, in dealing with Protagoras' doctrine, Aristotle reverses the order of Plato's arguments by beginning where Plato ends.⁴⁹ Plato starts off his treatment of Protagoras' doctrine in the *Theaetetus* by identifying it with perceptual and ontological relativism and ends up by showing that the theory of flux—implied by such a doctrine—leads to the negation of PNC, as well as making language impossible. Aristotle, on the other hand, can be understood to begin his treatment of Protagoras' doctrine at *Metaphysics* Γ 4 by showing that those who deny PNC make language impossible; he ends up by making Protagoras fully committed to perceptual and ontological relativism. This reversion in the order of arguments between Plato and Aristotle in their interconnected treatments of Protagoras' doctrine would also help us to understand why Aristotle first identifies Protagoras as a phenomenalist, that is, someone maintaining that every appearance is true.

If the understanding of Protagorean relativism (in the context of Plato's *Theaetetus* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Γ) I have offered is plausible, the kind of relativism the sophist is made to defend in both places is an ancient version of Margolis' robust relativism. As we have seen, what is typical of Protagoras' relativism is the same combination of epistemological and ontological concerns that is so central to Margolis' conception of relativism. I wish to stress such a linkage between Protagoras' relativism and Margolis' for two reasons. The first is mainly exegetical: if one adopts Margolis' robust relativism as the philosophical framework through which one reads Plato's and Aristotle's connected treatments of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* and *Metaphysics* Γ, one will get both a convincing account of Plato's moves and countermoves in that dialogue and of the logic of Aristotle's arguments in *Metaphysics* Γ 4–6, together with a plausible understanding of what, in philosophical terms, Protagoras' relativism amounts to. The second reason is,

⁴⁹ On this reversion, see Gottlieb 1994.

instead, purely philosophical. If Protagoras' relativism is an ancient version of Margolis' robust relativism, this will make it free from various theoretical weaknesses that most forms of relativism are saddled with.

The major philosophical risk that, on my account, any form of robust relativism is able to escape is that of being refuted by invoking an objective, neutral criterion of measurement. If one takes relativism as merely a theory of knowledge, or of truth or even meaning, one should, in fact, be prepared to deal with the following objection. Knowledge can be seen as relative, one might argue, but it will stop seeming to be so if what it is knowledge of is not relatively given, but is objectively determinable, out there waiting to be known independently of someone's point of view, or of cultural attitudes, and so on. If the world of macroscopic objects we perceive, together with the state of affairs somehow related to these objects, is ontologically determinate (hence objectively given), there cannot be any relativist knowledge of such a world because there will be one unique, correct apprehension of these objects (i.e., that corresponding to the truth, to the real essence of the perceived objects), all others being mistaken for various reasons.⁵⁰

If one denies, as Protagoras seems to do in the *Theaetetus* (on one of the two available interpretations) and in *Metaphysics* Γ, that there is a common, objective, ontologically determinate world of macroscopic objects out there, to which we turn to get a realistic account of how things actually are, the picture will change. If one assumes that we are confronted with a world of vague objects that are ontologically indeterminate, there will be no unique, correct apprehension available because each object will display some ontological features, not on its own but only in relation to the person who is about to perceive it. On this view, objects are relative both epistemologically and ontologically; we are thus confronted with a picture of a self-contained world, where both reality and knowledge are relative. (One may think of those incommensurable worlds Thomas Kuhn speaks of in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to get an idea of what I am referring to here.)

Any form of robust relativism is thus free from the most pervasive charge ever brought against relativism: that is why it is a *robust* relativism. There are, of course, other important objections one can raise against (Protagoras') robust relativism. Just to mention some of the questions Plato and Aristotle asked: what does it exactly mean to maintain that reality is ontologically indeterminate? Is this a coherent view to hold? As seen throughout this

⁵⁰ This is another way of putting forward the charge of self-refutation that is raised against relativism since the time of Plato's *Theaetetus*; see Zilioli 2007, 170–171.

article, Protagoras' doctrine is mainly about perceptions. Is it still consistent when it is applied to judgemental beliefs? Does perceptual activity in itself involve a sort of judgemental counterpart?⁵¹ In this contribution I have tried to make Protagoras' relativism, as depicted uniformly by both Plato and Aristotle, a plausible, intelligible and internally coherent philosophical position. I have done so because I have aimed at uncovering Protagoras from the shadows that ancient sources may cast on him and his doctrine, in order to get a serious grasp of his importance as a philosopher in the history of ancient thought. Elsewhere, I will deal with the objections against Protagoras' relativism I have just hinted at, which themselves bear witness to the philosophical impact that his relativism had on Plato, Aristotle and, hence, on later Greek philosophy.⁵²

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⁵¹ See *Theaetetus* 179 C 2–4 and, more generally, 184 B 3–186 E 12, where, by the use of the metaphor of the Wooden Horse (184 D 1–2), it is argued that perception does indeed involve a sort of judgement.

⁵² I thank Marlein van Raalte and Jan van Ophuijsen for comments on earlier drafts of the paper and for their care in preparing the volume. I am glad to thank the *Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (IRCHSS) for allowing me to conduct the research that has made this paper, among other things, possible.

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